

The Harmsworth Magazine

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THE STONE RIDER!

A SHORT STORY OF THE WEIRD.

By Nellie K. Blissett; Illustrated by Max Cowper.

IT was a dull day in early spring, and the wind in the pine forest behind the Castle of Salitz was making a melancholy moaning. In one of the deep window-seats of the castle I sat, with a book in my hand, looking down at the drowned landscape and the swollen river. I had come to visit that mysterious personage, Count Siebach von Salitz, whose extraordinary powers of thought-reading and prophecy would have brought him in several fortunes had he chosen to use them professionally. As it was, he was the object of much interest, and not a little awe, in half the capitals of Europe; and it was with some curiosity that I accepted his invitation to his Hungarian estate.

So far nothing in the least peculiar had occurred to me—a disappointment I was rather inclined to resent.

Siebach's step disturbed my meditations. I turned and saw him coming down the passage—a tall, gaunt man, with a haggard face and evil eyes. But if Siebach's personal appearance was not prepossessing, his charm of manner was so great that when you knew him well you forgot the small, cruel eyes, the sneering mouth, the curious mixture of power and cunning which characterized his countenance. His voice, too, was singularly beautiful, and atoned for many things.

He smiled as he came up and seated himself beside me.

"If you admire the view, you shouldn't look so solemn, Bazarac," he said; "and if you don't, and are bored, shall we go for a ride? Or will you come and look at my study?—you haven't seen it yet, and it is worth seeing."



"HAGGARD FACE AND EVIL EYES."

"Everything here is," I answered, as I rose and followed him downstairs.

He laughed.

"That is the disadvantage of being born a Siebach of Salitz—there is no merit in possessing perfection. It is merely inherited property. Don't knock your head against this doorway—it is low. That's right!"

We had passed under a low archway into a long room panelled with black oak. There was a table, littered with papers, near the window, and over the hearth hung the portrait of a young man whose countenance, particularly about the mouth, distinctly resembled that of Siebach.

"How like you that portrait is!" I exclaimed.

He looked at it for a moment as though weighing my remark carefully in his mind.

"Do you think so?" he said at last. "It is my poor cousin Franz."

"I didn't know you had one."

"He is dead. He was drowned whilst we were bathing in the river beneath. I was with him at the time, but I could not save him. His body was never recovered—it was an awful affair. He was only seven and twenty."

"Younger than you?"

"Oh, no—older. He was the heir. Poor Franz!"

I looked at the portrait with increased interest, and Siebach gazed at it too. There was a disagreeable expression on his face.

"It is a fine portrait," I said.

"Very—an Auberthal. You know Auberthal, of course? A splendid painter. Singular, now, I forgot that he will arrive here to-day. He has a long-standing engagement to visit me."

I was very glad to hear it, for I had known Auberthal when he was a mere boy, studying in Garcia's "Atelier Espagnol." We had seen a great deal of each other, and I had liked him exceedingly. Although Siebach was very entertaining, I did not altogether *trust* him; a solitude only relieved by his presence did not at the moment appear alluring.

I expressed my pleasure, and began to walk about the study, admiring the family portraits, of which there were a great number. Under one of them I noticed a curtain drawn across the wall, and, supposing it to conceal a picture or a cabinet, I very innocently put out my hand as if to draw it on one side.



"TALKING TOGETHER IN THE FOREST."

A sharp exclamation from Siebach stopped me. I dropped the curtain and turned to him.

"What is the matter?"

He recovered his self-possession immediately.

"Nothing. I was cutting a pencil and the knife slipped. Oh, it is only a scratch!"

"What is behind this curtain?" I asked, returning to my former occupation.

He did not answer at once. Then he laughed, a trifle uneasily.

"A family superstition—nonsense if you like. You can look."

I drew it accordingly. The curtain covered a large recess, and in this recess stood the life-sized statue of a horse in white marble, bearing a man in armour upon his back. The singular part about this equestrian group was, that whilst the horse was stone, the trappings and the man's armour were real.

"That is an odd idea," I remarked.

"What, the armour? Oh, it belonged to an ancestor of mine. Of course there is a stone figure underneath to match the horse."

"The vizor of his helmet is down. Why don't you raise it? It would be far more effective."

He laughed again more uneasily than ever.

"My dear Bazarac, 'Let sleeping men lie' is an excellent transposition of the old proverb. This gentleman is supposed to 'walk'—or rather ride. In other words, he is the family apparition. He is supposed to ride about the castle at night."

"What a very unpleasant idea!"

"Do you think so? Well, it is sufficiently ghastly, I admit."

"Have you ever seen him?"

"No, but I have often fancied I heard a horse snorting and trampling about the passages. At this time of year he is often heard. The servants tell odd stories about him, but I have never encountered him myself."

"It would be an interesting encounter."

Siebach shuddered visibly.

"I think not," he said, in an altered tone.

I looked up at him. His face was very pale, and his shifty glance avoided mine.

"You are afraid of him," I said, laughing.

An odd light blazed for a second in his eyes. He had a pair of gloves in his hand, having just come in from a walk. Suddenly, without any warning, he flung one glove full at the mailed face of the Stone Rider. The armour rattled, and the

glove fell back at Siebach's feet. He picked it up and looked me in the face.

"You see whether I am afraid," he said, haughtily.

I did not understand his manner, but I saw that it would be better to change the subject at once, and avoid it for the future. So I asked him at what time Auberthal would arrive, and we talked of other things.

Auberthal came in time for dinner—a little round man with a face all brown skin and black beard, and extraordinarily bright eyes. I should never have recognized in him the slip of a boy whose genius had electrified the "Atelier Espagnol," but he was as pleasant as ever. We passed a very enjoyable evening, and retired in due course to bed.

From the moment I had dropped the curtain across the recess in the study, I had never given another thought to the Stone Rider. Auberthal's arrival had successfully banished reflection on that somewhat peculiar incident. I undressed, and got into bed, and, as I was not sleepy, began to read. I suppose this was at about half-past eleven, and I went on reading steadily for over half an hour, at the end of which period I laid down my book and prepared to blow out my candles, when a sound arrested my attention, and I paused to listen. The castle had long been silent, and everyone had retired to rest. Yet there was a distinct sound as of someone moving about the corridors under me.

My room was in the second story of the building, at the head of the grand staircase —an immensely broad and imposing affair of beautifully inlaid marble. The corridors, too, were all marble paved, so that the slightest sound was noticeable in them. I listened, and distinctly heard the noise, whatever its cause, approach the foot of the staircase. Then it paused for a moment, and there followed a curious sound of scrambling, as of a large and somewhat unwieldy object coming up the stairs.

By this time my curiosity was thoroughly excited. I got out of bed and went to the door. As the room was very long, and the door at the farther end of it, this was a decidedly better post for listening purposes. I had not been there a second before I heard the unmistakable rattle of armour, and the snuffling sound a horse would make after any unusual exertion. A wild idea flashed across my mind, and I pressed closer to the door.

This was the Stone Rider!

The sounds came nearer and nearer until they were just outside. Then came another pause, and a heavy sigh—almost a groan—but whether from horse, or rider, I could not decide. Then the horse was turned round, and clattered and rattled down the shallow steps of the staircase, and away down the corridors, until all was silent once more.

All this time, though greatly excited, I had not felt the slightest sensation of fear; but now that all was still such a feeling of terror came over me that I lay awake for hours scarcely able to breathe, listening for the return of this midnight visitant. But he did not come, and towards morning I fell asleep.



"'IT IS GOING DOWN THE CORRIDOR TOWARDS THE STUDY.'"

At breakfast I observed that Auberthal, who had been very lively the previous evening, seemed silent and depressed. Siebach, too, looked rather yellower and thinner than usual. I enquired if they had not slept well.

"Oh, yes," answered Siebach, hastily, "I have slept very well indeed, thank you."

Auberthal said nothing for a moment.

"You don't look particularly brilliant yourself, Bazarac," he remarked presently.

"Somebody was racketing about the staircase last night and disturbed me," I replied carelessly. "Didn't you hear it, Auberthal? Your room is next mine. I wondered whether the noise would keep you awake."

Siebach looked up at me sharply and seemed about to speak. But he thought better of it, and returned to his breakfast.

"Yes," said Auberthal, quietly. "Something certainly kept me awake. That family ghost of yours, Siebach, I expect—the Stone Rider."

"I heard nothing," returned the Count, stolidly.

But Auberthal was not to be silenced.

"No? That is odd. I heard him distinctly. He stopped outside my door; and something groaned. It gave me a peculiar sensation. What makes him walk, Siebach—I suppose there's a legend?"

"Oh, there are lots of legends," answered Siebach, offhandedly. "One says that the Ritter von Salitz in the thirteenth century caused a statue of himself, on his favourite charger, to be set up in the courtyard of the castle, and when he took prisoners of war, he chained them to the Stone Rider and flogged them to death. When he was about sixty he married for the second time. His wife was very young and very beautiful, and had been betrothed to his eldest son, whom he hated, and banished from the castle. One day he found his son and his wife talking together in the forest. He seized them, had them lashed to the statue, and directed his men to flog them to death, whilst he himself stood by and derided them. However, that was the last atrocity he perpetrated, for he soon after went mad, and died. And his spirit is doomed to ride the stone horse for ever."

"A sufficiently horrible story, at any rate," remarked Auberthal, composedly. "Is the horse in your study the original of the courtyard."

"Yes. It has been most carefully preserved, and handed down from generation to generation."

"No wonder it roams about the castle at night," I said.

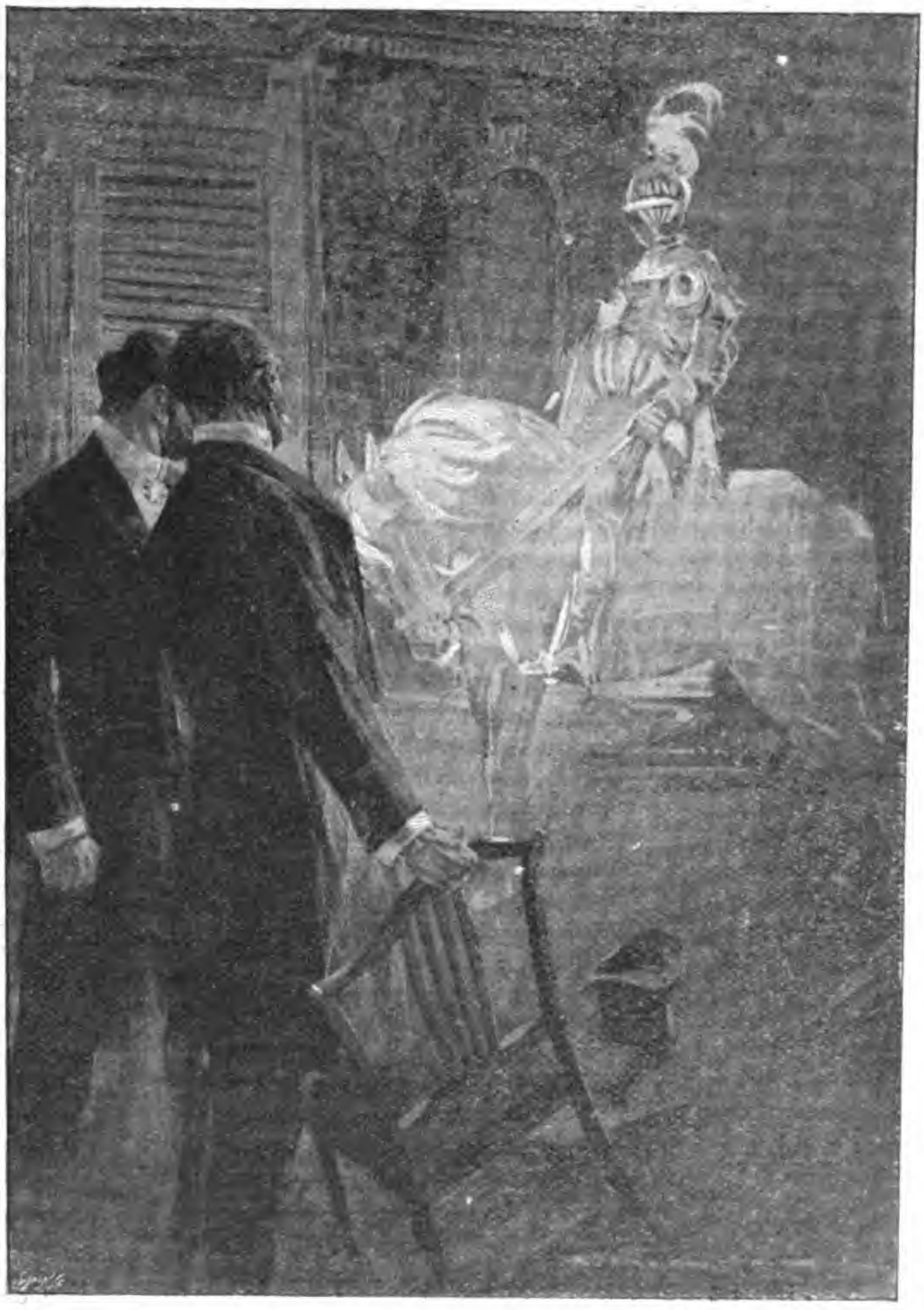
"That is mere nonsense," returned Siebach, irritably.

I said nothing more; but after breakfast I found an opportunity of speaking to Auberthal alone.

"I should like to investigate this matter," I said. "Will you help me, Auberthal?"

He laughed.

"Certainly; but I don't believe in ghosts, you know, Bazarac. I trust you don't?"



"FOR A FEW MOMENTS THE RIDER REMAINED MOTIONLESS."

"I have seen some very strange things in connection with ghosts; at all events, will you keep up to-night, and follow the Stone Rider with me?"

"If it will afford you any amusement."

"Don't speak to Siebach about it, then. He evidently does not care for the subject," and I related to him the incident of the glove.

He looked rather grave.

"I am sorry to hear it," he said, when I had finished. "There is insanity in his family, you know—I don't think his brain is what it was. And once he went off his head altogether."

"When?"

"Soon after his cousin was drowned. He saw it happen. That was enough to drive anyone mad, perhaps. But he was always queer."

"Then, to-night—?"

"Yes. When he gets to the bottom of the staircase again we will follow him."

The day passed off very quietly, and nothing more was said about the statue. We went to our rooms at the usual time, and I sat down to wait. At a few minutes past twelve I heard the noise beginning. It came up the staircase as it had done before, and paused for a moment outside the door. Then I again heard the sigh, or groan, and the clattering down the stairs. I opened my door and found Auberthal already on the landing.

"Make haste," he said. "It is going down the corridor towards the study."

We rushed down, and along the passage, the rattling going in front of us. But we were too slow. When we reached the study, the green baize curtain was drawn, and everything was perfectly still. After a moment's hesitation I pushed back the curtain. There sat the Stone Rider, immovable as ever, mailed and erect.

"He looks quite harmless," I said, doubtfully.

Auberthal bent down and held the candle closer. On the side of the horse were great dark stains, and the armour glimmered redly in the flame. The painter put his hand on one big patch, and drew back quickly.

"I could swear it was wet," he whispered. "Let us go!"

We returned, and I drew him into my room.

"It's very odd!"

"Very!" He held up his hand. "Do you see?"



"HE GRIPPED MY ARM."

"Good Heavens!" I gasped, "it's all red!"

"With blood," he said, solemnly.

* * * * *

For some days neither Auberthal nor I spoke of our adventure with the Stone Rider. But at last, one evening before dinner he came to me in my room.

"I shall go down into the study to-night," he said, "and see what really happens. Will you come too?"

"Yes. The noise at night still goes on?"

"Regularly every night. Bazarac, I mean to get to the bottom of this mystery."

"All right. I shall be charmed if you can prove the whole thing a hoax, but——"

"But what?"

"I don't think you will."

He considered for a moment.

"I don't think I shall either," he said, as he left me.

Siebach was unusually brilliant and amusing at dinner. He kept us at table long after our usual hour, and when we at last got away to our rooms there was barely time to let the castle become quiet, and get back to the study, before twelve o'clock. However, we accomplished the feat, seated ourselves near together, blew out the candle, and waited for the ghost to move.

For some time everything was silent. Then, all at once, the room became strangely illuminated. One after another the chairs, and tables, and pictures grew out of the gloom, lit up with a pale, peculiar light. And at last the curtain was drawn aside—the horse shook himself, and snorted—the armour rattled—and the Stone Rider rode slowly out into the middle of the room.

The supernatural radiance streamed from him—it issued from the closed bars of his helmet, from the steel breastplate, from the joints of the rusted gorget. It seemed to grow brighter every moment, till, almost dazzled, I turned my attention to the horse.

I did not at first notice the stain on his

side which Auberthal had observed. But as I looked at him, I saw that a dark stream began to trickle down the whiteness of the marble. It dripped from a great dent in the breastplate of the Rider—dripped slowly and steadily over the horse's neck, and rolled down to the floor.

For a few moments the rider remained motionless; then struck his spurs into the marble flanks of his steed, and they moved away. The light went with them through the open door, and Auberthal sprang up and rushed after them.

I saw the Stone Rider turn in his saddle and look back as we raced after him; and a flash of flame seemed to shoot out from between the helmet-bars. On they went—clattering, clashing, rattling through the stone passages, and we after them. They reached the staircase—the Rider rose in his stirrups and urged the horse up. The pace was too fast—the horse slipped, plunged—and finally recovered himself, just as an ordinary horse might do, and halted.

But the Rider's balance was destroyed. He swayed in the high saddle—his arms went wildly into the air—and he crashed forward, and fell, with a horrible rattling sound, at our feet. The clasps that fastened the gorget and breastplate burst—the helmet rolled away—and on the pavement before us lay a skeleton!

For a time we were too stunned to speak. Then Auberthal uttered an exclamation of horror and looked up.

Half way up the staircase stood Siebach von Salitz. His face was ghastly white—his eyes were widened with an expression of awful terror—his hands were stretched out as though grasping the air. He stood motionless for some moments, staring into vacancy; then his rigid expression relaxed, his arms dropped to his sides, and he came down the stairs.

"What has happened?" he enquired.

"That!" said Auberthal, bluntly, pointing to the skeleton.

Siebach bent over it for a moment. Then he kicked it contemptuously aside.

"Somebody has been playing a practical joke," he remarked.

Auberthal coughed.

"I have not, nor has Bazarac. Who could have done it?"

"Do you suppose I have?"

Siebach seemed indignant. Auberthal looked at him very quietly.

"I do not suppose anything," he said, "but there is the skeleton, and there is—"

He turned to look for the horse, but it was gone.

"There was the horse," he concluded, "and to-morrow morning I leave for Paris. Good-night!"

He disappeared up the staircase, leaving me face to face with Siebach.

"What does he mean?"



"I RECOGNISED ONE OF SIEBACH'S SERVANTS."

"I really don't know, Siebach."

"Do you intend to leave for Paris, too?"

"I am very sorry," I said, "but my nerves are really not equal to this sort of thing. Good-night, Siebach!"

He surveyed me with an odd expression; then, suddenly, he gripped my arm.

"Do you think—" he almost gasped in my ear—"do you think that he suspects anything?"

I shook him off.

"Good heavens, Siebach! What should he suspect? Can't you explain this horrible thing?"

He recovered his self-command almost immediately, and smiled feebly.

"No. I can't," he said. "Am I to explain all my family skeletons, Bazarac?"

"Not if you do not wish."

And I left him standing by the skeleton of the Stone Rider.

* * * * *



"HIS EYES BLAZED WITH FEVERISH LIGHT."

For some years I did not come across Count Siebach von Salitz—neither, I am afraid, did I wish to do so. Of the Stone Rider—who had proved to be no stone at all—I often thought, but at last I hardly regarded the incident as anything more than the recollection of a bad dream. Auberthal and I met frequently, and often discussed our adventure; and I believed that he had suspicions concerning Siebach which I did not care to share. But one evening as we sat in the "Atelier Espagnol"—Auberthal and myself—someone knocked at the door and came hastily in. I recognised one of Siebach's servants.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Will M. Bazarac or M. Auberthal come to my master at once? He is very ill at the Hôtel ——."

We both rose and looked at each other, and Auberthal slipped his arm through mine.

"We had better go together."

So we went. The Hôtel —— was close by. In ten minutes we were in Siebach's bedroom.

He lay in bed, looking thinner and more haggard than ever. His eyes blazed with feverish light, and he beckoned us eagerly to approach.

"There is not much time," he said, speaking in a weak, strained voice; "I sent for you to tell you—what is that?"

His eyes dilated with fear, and he glanced round the room.

"It is nothing," said Auberthal, gently.

He laughed—a short, bitter laugh.

"He is not far off—he never is. Don't you hear the horse breathing outside the door? I can. I always hear it now. Don't let it come in—don't—don't, Auberthal!"

His voice rose to a shriek.

"Nothing shall come in."

"Thank you. I am so foolish to mind! I—I wanted to tell you. I—I murdered him."

He fell back exhausted.

"Whom?" asked Auberthal, aghast.

"My cousin Franz. He was the heir."

"But he was drowned."

Siebach struggled up on his elbow.

"No, I told them that. I shot him; and I knew if they found the body they would accuse me, so I hid it. And when his father died, and I got the castle, I dug him up—and—you know. I could not hide the skeleton, so I put it on the horse. Don't you think that was a good idea?"

He laughed, and Auberthal looked at me with a shudder.

"The armour hid it," went on Siebach, "and I knew they were all so superstitious they wouldn't touch it. And then you came—you and Auberthal."

At that moment the doctor came in. When he left the room he called me out.

"Count Siebach is mad?" I questioned,

"He is not responsible for what he says. Are you a friend of his?"

"In a way."

"Then you had better stay with him. Send for me if he gets worse. I shall do no good by stopping."

I went back to Auberthal. Siebach was obviously too ill to be left. I agreed to sit up with him half the night, whilst Auberthal rested.

Siebach was exhausted, and for some hours lay quite still. I think he was insensible. But about 12 o'clock I heard a sound from the bed, and went to him. He was sitting up, looking straight before him into space.

"Don't you hear it?" he asked.

I listened, to appease him.

"No."

"Not the horse?"

I listened more attentively.

Yes—the old rattle—the old sound of a horse's hoofs. It was coming up the stairs.

Slowly the door opened—slowly the light I had seen before grew in the darkened air—and into the room rode the Stone Rider, rigid, erect, with the unearthly radiance all around him.

He came up to the foot of the bed, and slowly lifted the vizor of his helmet, disclosing a glistening skull—and, as I looked, the skull became the face in the portrait over the mantelpiece of the study at Salitz. It was too evident that Siebach recognised it. His eyes were fixed on the apparition; his thin features were grey, and drawn with fear. For a moment he remained motionless, staring at it; then he threw up his arms with an awful cry, and fell back.

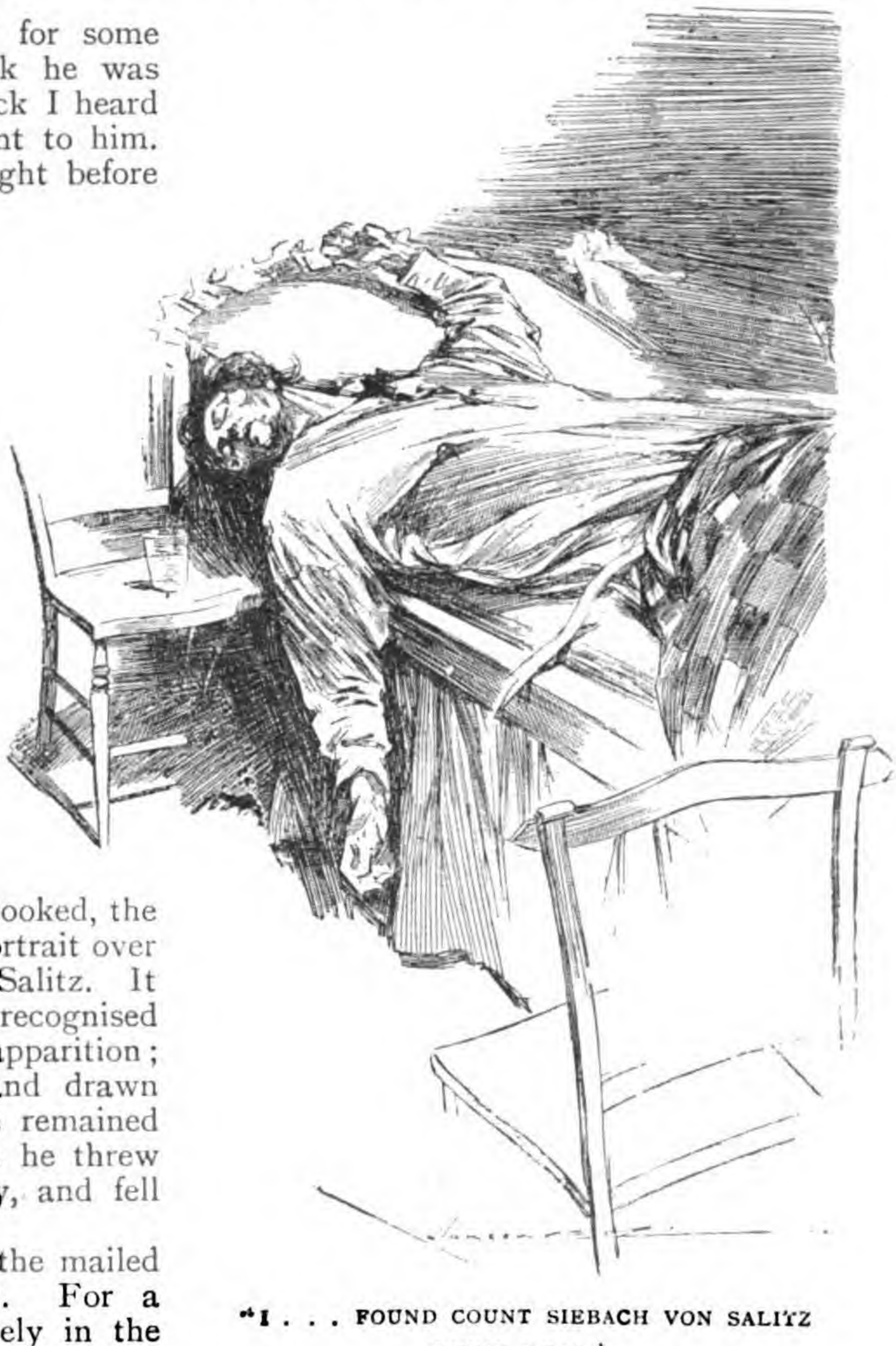
Slowly the Stone Rider drew the mailed gauntlet from his right hand. For a moment he poised it deliberately in the air, then flung it full in Siebach's face.

A shudder ran through the prostrate figure, but it did not move again; and the Stone Rider turned his horse and rode from the room. The light followed him, and we were again in semi-darkness.

Then I lit a candle and rang for Auberthal and the servants.

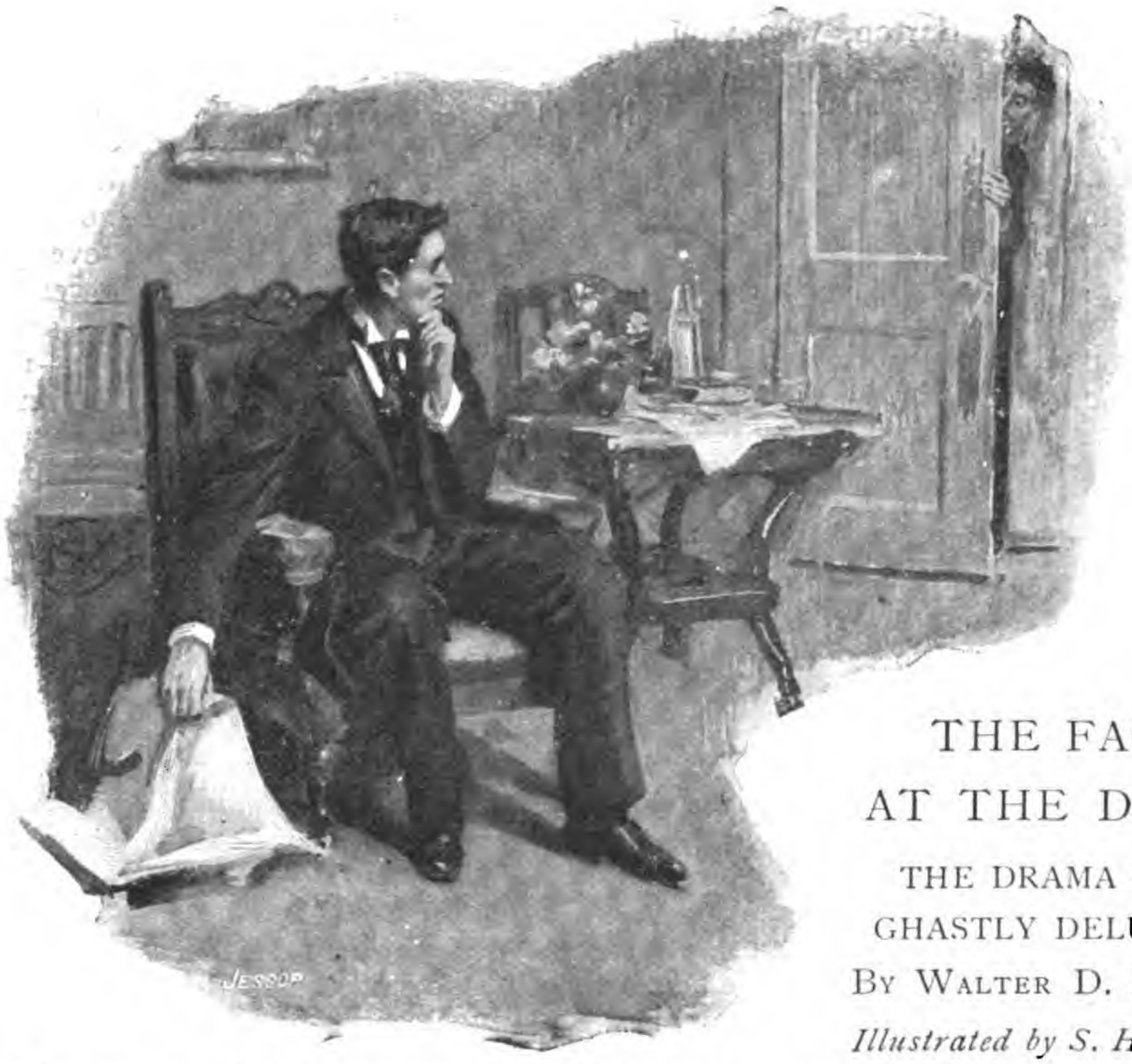
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Whether the story of the murder was correct or not, I cannot say. It may have been the madness of a diseased imagination, or it may have been the late remorse of a criminal. At any rate, it is not for me to throw suspicion on the name of a dead man. I can only relate what I myself saw and heard. The doctor declared, and maintains to this day, that his patient was insane; and, being a doctor, he very naturally has the world on his side. But,



"I . . . FOUND COUNT SIEBACH VON SALITZ LYING DEAD.'

say what he will, there is one thing he can never explain. When I lit the candle that night, and found Count Siebach von Salitz lying dead, I found also that on his forehead was the distinct print—purple and bruised—of a clenched fist. The doctor cannot explain this; perhaps I can. For what could it be if it was not left by the gauntlet of the Stone Rider?



THE FACE AT THE DOOR.

THE DRAMA OF A GHASTLY DELUSION.

By Walter D. Dobell.

Illustrated by S. H. Vedder.

A Story in Two Letters from Thomas Campbell, of London, to his Brother, Dr. John Campbell, in Bombay.

Dear Jack, Jan. 3rd., 1898.

WHAT the Psychical Research Society really wants is an authentic record of any supernatural or inexplicable event in the life of a "healthy subject" with nerves of iron, and a hearty contempt for all forms of superstition.

Therefore I have not the slightest intention of following your advice and laying this story before that most learned and conscientious tribunal, because I fear that I cannot claim for John Barton, the principal actor in this little drama, either remarkably good health or a complete freedom from superstition. But as you ask for the details you shall have them.

I first met Barton some two years ago in the rooms of a friend of mine. We had been playing whist, and after the departure of the fourth player he and I stayed on talking with our host till the early hours of the morning.

The conversation ran chiefly on vampires, wehr-wolves, and other subjects of an equally light and cheerful nature, and Barton, I remember, showed himself to be an adept at the art of making the flesh creep. He walked part of the way home with me, and we discovered that we had quite a large number of friends and interests in common.

I came across him constantly after this, and one day when he was dining with me —in September, '95, I think it was—he told me that he was engaged to be married, and a few days afterwards introduced me to the lady. I was much struck by her beauty and the wonderful power that was expressed both in her face and by her speech and bearing.

Her age, if a poor bachelor is any judge, was about twenty-eight, and she was, I believe, of Russian extraction. She was living with friends in Paris, the Russian heaven, and naturally Barton spent most of his time in the same city, so that though I heard of him and from him from time to time, we never actually met again till

January of this year. Mickleham asked me to come and dine with him for the purpose of meeting Barton, who would, he said, leave England again in a couple of days. I gladly accepted the invitation, and a very pleasant dinner we had at the Travellers' Club, adjourning afterwards to Mickleham's rooms, where we sat and talked for two or three hours.

I noticed at dinner that Barton was not looking well, and afterwards, though he talked as much and as brilliantly as usual, he studiously avoided supernatural subjects, once his favourite topic, and displayed marked uneasiness whenever the talk strayed in that direction. I don't think Mickleham noticed anything—he never was exactly a Sherlock Holmes, you remember—and in fact there was only one trivial indication of the state of Barton's nerves that was particularly remarkable. He seemed to have acquired a habit, even in the middle of some of his best stories, of continually glancing in a sidelong fashion at the door. Once, indeed, he rose and went towards it as if to close it; but seeing, as I then supposed, that it was shut, he went back to his seat.

We both left at about one o'clock, and as he was sleeping at the Métropole we parted at the corner of St. James' Street, and I said good-bye and wished him a pleasant crossing, thinking, of course, that I should not see him again before he left England. You can judge of my surprise when after walking home I found Barton already in my rooms. He apologised, saying that he had remembered something which he had meant to tell me, and had driven back to do it, passing me, I suppose, on the way. It was some time before I could get him to tell me what it was that he had forgotten. I was rather riled, as I wanted to go to bed, but when at last he did begin his story, I can tell you there wasn't much sleepiness left in me. He told it as no one else could have told it, and it's a solid fact that he made me feel like a frightened child, and you know I'm not a particularly imaginative man.

He began by asking me if I had observed his continual glances at the door in Mickleham's room—he was keeping his eye on my door, by the way, all the time he was telling the story. I said I had observed this, and he then gave me the reason for his conduct, and, by George, old boy, when I heard what he was always seeing when he did look at the aforesaid door, I admired the poor devil for his pluck as much as I pitied him for his delusion. I'm quite certain I couldn't stand it for half a minute, and he had been bearing it for more than a year.

He said that the door of any and every room in which he was always appeared to be ajar, and round the edge of the door—I declare it frightens me even to think of it—round the corner, as it were, just coming into the room, he always saw the hand and half the face of a man—never more, and never less. The hand was grasping the door about a foot above the handle, and the face was peering round it, with one eye—he couldn't see the other—always fixed on him. Cheerful, wasn't it? He could see the nose, which was very large and fleshy, and all the left side of the face, which was a sort of dirty white. The hair was black and rather long, he thought, and there was a large abrasion—"something between a cut and a bruise" was his phrase—on the temple.

He had been receiving this delightful visitor daily ever since the autumn of '95—a pleasant year he must have had of it, poor chap. I told him to go to a doctor, but he said that he had tried that without any success—had told the doctor that he was suffering from delusions, and had implicitly followed his instructions, but still the white face kept turning up at the door.

He seemed chiefly distressed about it because of his approaching marriage; he had, as I told you, become engaged in September, '95. He spoke very nicely of his future wife, of whom he seemed extremely fond, and asked my advice as to telling her all about it. I thought he had better not, and advised him to go in for hard exercise and early hours—but really I did not know what to say to him. "Paternosters were peas in plates to his sorrows."

He seemed rather more cheerful before he left, and we tried an interesting, though to me a somewhat alarming, experiment. Keeping his eyes fixed on the door, Barton walked slowly towards it, and laid his hand upon the handle. Directly he did this the face, he said, disappeared, but the hand remained. While he was turning the handle, however, the hand, which he said was large and dirty, followed the example of the head, and it became instantly clear to Barton that the door was not really ajar, but tightly closed. This was the invariable programme, he told me.

I saw him off, wished him well rid of his encumbrance, and promised to say nothing about it; then, taking my life and my candle in my hands, I rushed frantically up to bed.

I didn't meet Barton again until his wedding, which took place last month. He was looking nervous and harassed, but not more so than most men in his unhappy plight—it was a regular church affair. Naturally I had no opportunity for a quiet talk with him, even if I had been particularly anxious to have one—which I was not.

The happy pair started for Italy to spend their honeymoon, and I gave them a day's law before following. I had promised to join Robinson in Florence, and was already overdue. I hadn't the slightest intention of meeting the Bartons, and therefore of course they were almost the first English people that I came across in the streets of Florence. We exchanged a few fatuous remarks, and I then hurried away. It was too early in the honeymoon for them to be longing, like the couple in *Punch*, "for some friend to turn up, or even some enemy." That very evening, however, Barton came round to see me. I introduced him to Robinson, and we all talked for a bit in the hotel verandah, but it was so obvious that Barton had something to say to me in private that Robinson soon left us.

"Campbell," said Barton immediately, "it's getting worse than ever."

"What is?" I asked, though I knew.

"That infernal man at the door: I can see nearly all his face round the corner now, and I tell you I'm losing my nerve. And there's a new development: he doesn't always look at me now. I've noticed sometimes that his eyes—I can see both are fixed on Helene, my wife; and it's that, I think, that has shaken me."

"You haven't told her, I suppose?" said I.

"Of course not: but I think she sees that there's something wrong. I've seen her look at me very curiously at times, though she doesn't say anything. You don't think I ought to tell her?"

"Certainly not," I said; "but for goodness' sake go to a decent doctor when you get home, and tell him everything. I'm very sorry for you, my dear fellow, but that's really all I can advise; and if I were you I wouldn't put it off too long."

"We're going home next week," he said, and we parted. I really don't see what I could



"SHE WAS A RUSSIAN, AND I WAS MUCH STRUCK BY HER BEAUTY."

have said that could have done the slightest good. It was in his liver or his eyes that the fault lay, I thought—I'm not so sure about that now—and I'm no doctor.

Well, two days after this interview, while Robinson and I were at dinner, a waiter came to me and said that there was a lady in our private room who insisted on seeing me immediately. I went up, of course, and there found Mrs. Barton in a state of terrible excitement and anxiety.

"You must come with me, Mr. Campbell," she cried, on seeing me; "my husband has met with a terrible accident," and she literally dragged me out of the hotel into her carriage.

"He is in a doctor's house," she said, as we rattled furiously down the street; "the accident happened at the very door, and he was carried in. He has been asking continually for you."

I thought she seemed to resent this, and perhaps it was only natural. "How did it happen?" I asked.

"He had been buying some old armour and two old Florentine daggers, and was carrying them home when he slipped and fell, and one of the daggers ran into his leg. It was all my fault, I ought to have helped him to carry the things; his hands were full, and he couldn't save himself."

"Oh, it will be all right, Mrs. Barton," said I; "a cut in the leg is not very serious."

"Not serious!" she replied, angrily; "the doctor said himself that in ten seconds more he would have bled to death. Here is the house; I shall take you straight to him." She hurried me through the open door of a somewhat mean little dwelling—we had driven into a rather low quarter of the town. I didn't know Florence well enough to be sure exactly where we were, and during my drive I had been too much occupied to look out of the window. We went into a small bedroom on the ground floor. Two little men in black coats were standing by the bed, and on it lay Barton, with a face of the most ghastly pallor and wildly glaring eyes.

"Thank God you've come, Campbell," he gasped. "I'm too weak—too weak—you must keep him out," and then his head fell back and he fainted. Restoratives were applied without avail, and the two men in black exchanged whispers in Italian which I could not catch.

"Speak English," said Mrs. Barton, furiously—she looked like a madwoman—"Speak English. What are you going to do?"

I thought it improbable that either of the men would know the language, but I was wrong.

"We are agreed," said the taller of the two, speaking with a very slight accent, "my brother and I, that one thing only can be done. Your husband is dying from want of blood: we must give him more blood. How much will you pay?"

"There's no question of that," I said, as I grasped his meaning; "you can bleed me, I'm willing. Be quick, there's no time to lose."

"No, no," said the doctor, "you are not strong enough; it might not save him; it would certainly lose—that is, kill you. But we are fortunate; there is in our house what you call a lodger, he is strong and his blood will serve. He will not refuse me, he is of the Religion; but you must pay."

"Of the Religion?" I said. "Oh, I see, you are a Jew. Well, I will guarantee you five hundred pounds; divide it as you choose, only make haste."

"That will be sufficient," said the shorter of the brothers, "but you and the lady must not be here. The room is small; I will take you to another, and bring down our guest, and I will tell you when it is finished, that you may thank him."

So saying, he led us into a room facing the door of the bedroom and locked us in. I heard him go upstairs; heard voices: then his steps coming down, followed by someone with a much heavier tread; heard them enter the bedroom and close the door. Mrs. Barton was lying back in her chair in a sort of stupor, and I was examining the room by the light of one candle—it was now nearly half-past nine—when I heard a sudden outbreak of noise, the bedroom door opened, the key of our door was turned, and the taller of the two brothers looked in.

"The gentleman must come, please," he said, and I hurried out. "He is calling for you," he said, closing the door, "and will not keep still; we can do nothing if he will not keep still."

We went into the bedroom. Barton was tossing wildly about on the bed; the little doctor was trying to keep him down while a tall dark man of an unmistakably Jewish type was holding the injured leg as still as he was able. I went up and took Barton's hands in mine: instantly he became perfectly quiet, and his eyes closed.

"Keep him away. Campbell, I trust to you," he said, and lapsed into unconsciousness.

"We must be quick," said the little doctor. "If the gentleman holds the right hand all will be well; we will operate on the left arm. Come, Israel," to the stranger, "stand here."

Barton was lying perfectly still, but when the man Israel approached the head of the bed an extraordinary shudder ran through his body, his eyes opened and glared at me, and his lips moved as if to speak; but apparently the sight of me sitting by the bed soothed him, for the panic died out of his eyes and his head fell back again on the pillow.

The operation commenced. I'm not doctor enough to give you the details, and I could not see very clearly, but apparently the doctors—for both the brothers appeared to be medical men—had established, by means of a sort of a pipe, a connection between the circulatory system of the big Jew and the poor fellow on the bed, so that the blood of the former poured into the veins of the latter.

As this idea came home to me, I glanced anxiously at the stranger to see if he was fitted to bear such a strain, and I was satisfied. A fine full-blooded fellow he looked, six feet high and well built, with black hair and ruddy cheeks, which seemed to me to be gradually growing paler, but perhaps this may have been due to the failing light of the little lamp by whose feeble rays this difficult operation was being performed.

It seemed to me that this wonderful lending or selling of life, as it were, had been going on for a long time, when I heard a slight noise behind me, and, glancing round, I saw Mrs. Barton at the end of the room near the door. Her eyes were fixed in a stare of terror on the face, not of her husband on the bed, but on the stranger who was saving that husband's life. The operation was almost over apparently. Barton's face was in shadow, and I could see no change in its appearance, but the smaller of the two doctors was bringing forward instruments and bandages with a view apparently to the necessary stoppage of the flow of blood when the connecting pipe should be removed. I motioned to Mrs. Barton to keep back and be silent. I suppose the big Jew Israel noticed my gesture, for his eyes turned towards the door. I saw his face, which was now very pale, suddenly stiffen as it were, and in another moment he gave a terrible cry, and leaped back from the bed.



"'MY HUSBAND HAS MET WITH A TERRIBLE ACCIDENT,' SHE CRIED."

The smaller doctor, with the most admirable presence of mind, instantly commenced operations on Barton's arm, while his brother seized hold of his lodger round the waist. Mrs. Barton, her eyes still fixed on the big Jew, was crouching down at the end of the room, and I hurried round the bed only just in time to stop the man Israel, who rushed towards

her, dragging the doctor after him, and yelling out some perfectly unintelligible gibberish. It was obvious, however, that he meant murder, and I collared him in front while the doctor hung on gallantly behind. Israel was enormously strong, and, seizing the little man by the neck, he simply tore him off and flung him away into a corner of the room. In doing this, however, he threw all his weight on to his left foot, which I promptly kicked from under him, and we came down together, knocking over the table and rolling wildly about on the floor.

He seemed to be growing weaker, and at last I got my knee on his chest, when I suddenly remembered that his arm had never been attended to, that he must be bleeding to death. I could see nothing; for in our fall his head had struck the table and upset the lamp—thank goodness it was filled with colza, not paraffin—so I yelled to the doctors to strike a light and lend a hand. The little man, who had quietly finished Barton's arm while we were waltzing about all over the floor, relighted the lamp, and I don't think I shall ever forget the scene that the feeble light displayed to me.

Barton was sitting up on the bed looking anxiously in my direction; one doctor was just getting on to his feet, the other was hurrying towards me, and in the corner by the door was huddled Mrs. Barton, still wildly staring round, but perfectly motionless. I looked down at the man on the floor, and saw to my horror that he was on the point of death—in fact, before the little doctor could reach him, and put the lamp down, his jaw had dropped and his head fell back with a thud on the bare boards.

"He is dead," said the little man, quietly; "that blow on the head would perhaps have sufficed, but the cause of death was loss of blood; perhaps the gentleman would prefer to make the fee seven hundred pounds and he shall not be troubled with any too curious questions. As the gentleman's carriage is at the door, the gentleman had better be removed; it will not hurt him. Is there anything the matter with the lady?"

Mrs. Barton had risen, and now came slowly forward. "No," she said, "I am well. That man—I was afraid—I thought he was going to—to hurt me."

"It was so, without doubt," said the little man, calmly; "he was angry. Is the gentleman ready to be moved?"

"All right," said Barton, speaking in quite his ordinary voice, "all right, I can walk."

"He must be carried," said the doctors together; "the other gentleman will help us, and then he will perhaps arrange about the money."

We picked Barton up amongst us, his wife going first to prepare the carriage for his reception, and carried him to the door.

"Stop a minute!" said Barton, suddenly, "let me see the poor fellow who is dead."

"It is right that the gentleman should see him," said the smaller brother, "he saved the gentleman's life."

We had propped the corpse up in a sitting position against the end of the bed, and Barton looked long into the ghastly face.

"Good God! how strange!" he whispered at last. "He has saved my life, and I feared him—how I feared him!"

"The gentleman knew Israel Hoffmann then?" said the taller of the two doctors.

"No," said Barton, "I have never met him before. Go on," and we carried him to the carriage where his wife was waiting us. I got in with them, telling the doctors I would return immediately, and they allowed me to depart without protest, somewhat to my surprise. I saw Barton safely in bed, and was hurrying from the room when he called me back and asked his wife to leave us for a moment.

"Campbell," he said, when she had gone, "do you know who that man was?"

"No," said I, "he was a lodger in the house. I know no more than that, but I can find out if you like."

"I don't mean that," he said; "that man's face was the face that had peered at me round the door for more than a year; the face I had told you about, the face I had grown to fear as I never feared anything in my life before; and yet that man has saved my life. It was good, not evil, that the vision meant, Campbell—good, not evil, and it was nearly driving me mad. Go back to that house; you can leave me safely, I am happier and better than I ever was before. I thought the thing was evil, and I find it to be good."

I left him repeating these words over and over again, told his wife, and hurried back to my rooms. Then, having procured the money, I drove to the doctor's house. I settled with the two little men in the sitting-room, and then asked if I might see the body.

"It is upstairs," they said. "We will arrange everything; he is of the Religion. But you may see him."

I went upstairs, and there on a bed in a tiny room lay the body of my late antagonist, wrapped in a sheet. The face was exposed, and I examined it with interest. It was deathly pale and somewhat fallen away, the thick, curving nose standing forward prominently. On the left temple and on the forehead was a terrible bruise, caused, I suppose, by the edge of the table on which the lamp had stood. Certainly the face tallied marvellously with Barton's description of his visionary visitor. I went back to my rooms and tried to puzzle the thing out, but I can't say that I succeeded. The connection that seemed to exist between the dead man and Mrs. Barton only complicated matters instead of simplifying them.

Robinson and I are still staying on here, but the Bartons left yesterday, Barton having recovered in a perfectly marvellous manner. I've written a very long letter, old boy, but as you seem excited by the remarks I let fall in my last epistle to you about the subject, I thought I had better give you the full details. I'm afraid I must ask you not to repeat the story—you will yourself see the reasons against so doing. I don't know if you will be able to form any theory about it—I shall be glad to hear it if you can. Hoping to get a letter from you soon, and that you are quite fit,

I am

Your loving brother,

TOM.

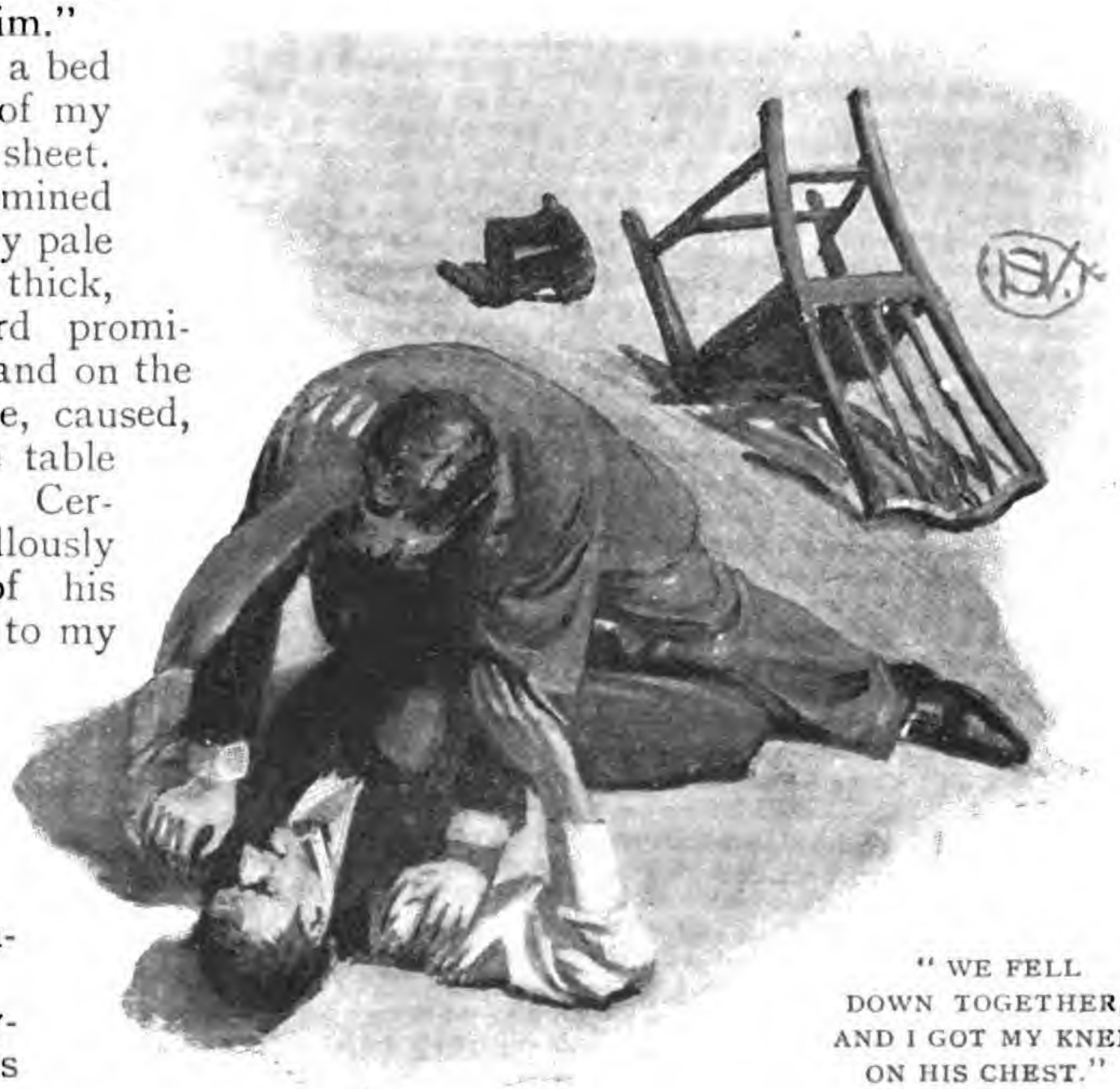
* * * *

April 14, 1898.

DEAR JACK,

I will give you, since you desire it, full details of the whole terrible business, but I must repeat the caution of my last letter. Don't make this public just yet. Of course many of the facts are known, but still I should prefer you not to repeat what I am going to tell you. I am taking legal advice on the subject.

In my letter to you, last summer, I told you, I think, all about Barton's strange delusion and the extraordinary episode of the transfusion of blood from the very man whose wraith he was always seeing into Barton's own veins. The Bartons had been in England for some time before I returned to find an invitation awaiting me to dine at their house in town. I accepted, as I was anxious to see how Barton was getting on, and whether he had got rid of his horrible delusion.



"WE FELL DOWN TOGETHER, AND I GOT MY KNEE ON HIS CHEST."

I found him in the best of health, better and stronger apparently than he had been even before the commencement of his hallucination; but Mrs. Barton was much paler and thinner than when I had seen her last. I was the only guest, and the burden of the conversation was borne by myself and Barton, who was really almost boisterous at times—an extraordinary change for him. Mrs. Barton scarcely spoke. I noticed that she never so much as glanced in the direction of her husband. I thought at the time that probably the first tiff of their married life had come off some time that day, and that Barton's boisterousness and his wife's silence arose from the same cause. I know better now.

When Mrs. Barton left us to our cigarettes, I asked about the man at the door. Barton, I think, was rather vexed at the question, but he told me that he had no return of the vision, and then passed on to something else. I also inquired after his wife's health, and as far as I could judge

he seemed actually pleased to hear that I thought her looking ill, and his manner of speaking of her altogether confirmed me in the idea that they had had a quarrel, and a fairly serious quarrel, that very day, though of course I couldn't pursue the subject.

A short while afterwards a message was brought in to Barton, and he asked me to excuse him for a few minutes, as he must see someone—a groom I think he said—and would rejoin me in the drawing-room.

I went upstairs and entered into conversation with my hostess, whose manners had completely changed. She talked now with a feverish rapidity, and I noticed with the most intense surprise, and I must add with a creeping sensation of horror, that she had caught Barton's trick of constantly shooting anxious glances at the door. I suppose she saw that I had observed her, for she turned her chair round with its back to the door and said—

"I was wondering why my husband did not come."

I told her that he was engaged for the moment, and she continued—

"Have you noticed any change in him, Mr. Campbell?"

"He seems marvellously well," I replied. "We really owe a great debt to the two little doctors and to——"

I stopped abruptly. Mrs. Barton had grown ghastly pale, and I remembered how fiercely the Jew had endeavoured to attack her in that terrible little room in Florence. Once again she seemed to read my thoughts.

"I knew that man Israel Hoffmann, Mr. Campbell," she said. "I am a Russian, you know, and we—my father and I—disliked him, and he hated us, and had threatened often to revenge—that is, to injure us. My father warned me against him only a few months before he died, and you see how the man tried to attack me on that night. We do not like Jews in Russia you know, Mr. Campbell.—Why, what is it?"

"Nothing," I said, hastily, but I'm afraid my voice shook; "I thought I saw your husband coming in—I was mistaken."

It was no mistake, I knew. It was Barton's face that I had seen looking round the door, with his eyes fixed on his wife; but as I spoke the head was withdrawn, and the door softly closed.

"Mr. Campbell," said—or, rather, gasped—the woman at my side, "was he—was he peering at me round the door?"

"Well, I—I thought so," I stammered.

"He always does that now," she whispered, "and it frightens me, Mr. Campbell—it frightens me. What does it mean?"

What on earth was I to say? Here was Barton apparently taking the place of his departed ghastly visitor; but how was I to explain this to his wife, who had never heard, and now most certainly must never hear, of her husband's hideous delusion. I was relieved from my difficulty by Barton himself, who now entered the room with the same boisterously cheerful manner that I had noticed before.

"Well, I hope you're not bored, Campbell," he cried.

"Very much the reverse," said I, with perfect truth.

"I'm afraid that isn't true," said Mrs. Barton; "I'm very dull to-night, but Mr. Campbell must excuse me—my head is aching terribly, and I really think I must go to bed."

Of course, I expressed my sympathy and wished her good-night; but as I opened the door for her she whispered, "For God's sake stay as long as you can. Good-night."

Well, I did stay as long as I could; and if ever a host made it clear to a guest that he wasn't wanted, Barton did that night. After about an hour of it he asked me point blank to go, as he had had a very tiring day.

I couldn't very well stay on after that, could I? I soothed my conscience by determining to find some pretext for coming round to the house the next morning, and got up to go. Barton helped me on with my coat himself, and while he was doing



"IT WAS BARTON'S FACE—HIS EYES FIXED ON HIS WIFE."

so I noticed an immensely heavy whip lying on an old oak chest in the hall.

"Sorry for your horses, Barton," said I, "if that's your idea of a riding-crop."

Barton laughed.

"It's a Russian executioner's knout," he said. "I got it as an interesting curiosity, and a pretty penny I had to pay for it. I thought it might interest my wife—she's a Russian, as you know."

"Rather a ghastly present," I said.

"Oh, horrors appeal to the Slavonic temperament," he answered; "she'll be glad to have that knout. Good-night."

I must admit that I left the house with a very strong presentiment of trouble to come, and cudgelling my brains in vain to discover a reason for Barton's amazing conduct at the drawing-room door. I did not like to ask him about it—the less said about his delusion the better, I thought—but I determined to come round in the morning; I could make the Russian knout an excuse for doing so—I could easily assume an interest in a curiosity like that.

So at ten o'clock next day I walked round to the Bartons'. As I turned the corner into Pont Street, I saw with a thrill of undefined dread that there was a small crowd gathered round the Bartons' house, and two policemen were engaged in pushing the people back from the door, which was open. I forced my way furiously through the crowd, and seeing the white face of the old butler in the hall, behind the policemen, I called to him. He came forward and I was admitted, after some delay, as a friend of the family.

"What is it, Parsons?" I asked.

"God knows, Mr. Campbell," he whispered. "Mr. and Mrs. Barton breakfasted together in the oak room this morning: there wasn't no one waiting, and about ten minutes gone I heard a cry and went to the door. It was locked, Mr. Campbell, and there's something goin' on in there as I don't like, sir. The police are breaking in the door now."

I hurried past the old fellow, and up the stairs to the oak room, a little panelled room with a strong oak door, which two men, a policeman and the footman, were trying to break in. From the room came a noise of blows and of a voice singing, heard from time to time, as the two men paused in their violent attack on the door. The voice was strange to me, and I could make nothing of the words of the song; they were not English, that was all I could



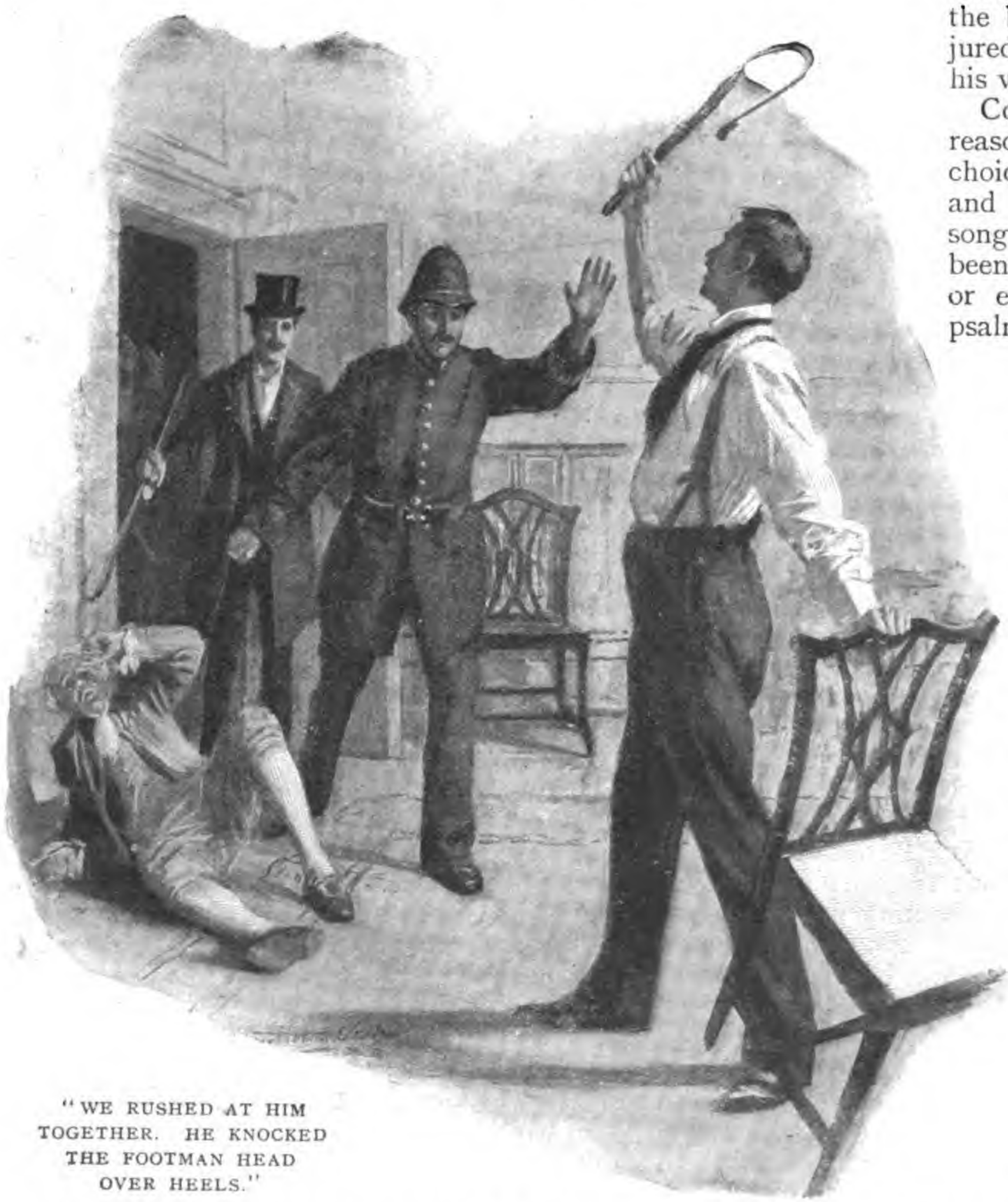
"THE POLICEMAN AND BUTLER TRIED TO BREAK IN THE STRONG OAK DOOR."

discover. As I threw my weight against it the door gave way, and the three of us tumbled into the room together. It was a ghastly sight, Jack. There, with her head on the table among the breakfast things and her body resting across the back of a chair, lay Mrs. Barton, dead, and horribly lacerated on the back and shoulders, from which the clothes had been torn away. Her husband was standing beside her, still singing the hideous song we had heard, and waving round his head the terrible whip that I had seen the night before, and which was now dripping with the blood of the wretched woman whose life he had taken.

We all rushed in at him together: he knocked the footman head over heels with his left hand, and struck at me with his whip, but at the same moment the policeman at my side cut him down with a blow of his truncheon, and he lay writhing on the floor. I lifted up the body of the poor woman, but finding that life was quite

extinct I laid her down and turned to the madman at my feet. The blow of the policeman's staff had caught him on the side of the head, crushing it in like an egg-shell, and I saw that he was dying. I knelt down by him, and he seemed to recognise me, but in a moment his eyes closed, and though he breathed for more than an hour he never recovered consciousness.

You read my evidence at the inquest: of course my description of Barton's delusion was necessary to establish the poor fellow's undoubted madness, but I did not think it incumbent on me to enter into great detail. Now, I want your opinion as a medical man. This affair has shaken my nerves in the most terrible way.



"WE RUSHED AT HIM TOGETHER. HE KNOCKED THE FOOTMAN HEAD OVER HEELS."

Of course the vision and its fulfilment, if you can call it such, is and must remain inexplicable. It is Barton's conduct after the operation that I want you to explain.

I know, from certain correspondence that I have in my hands, that the man Israel Hoffmann was terribly wronged by Mrs. Barton and her father: his wife was, in fact, executed on their representations alone, as far as I can ascertain, and the whole object of his life was revenge. Is it possible that the spirit of vengeance passed into Barton's soul as the blood of the injured Jew passed into his veins?

Could that be the reason for his strange choice of a weapon, and for the ghastly song, which may have been a Russian song, or even one of the psalms in Yiddish for all I know, which he sang as he beat his wife to death? If this is so, the only feeling we should have towards poor Barton is one of intense pity; and if not, if such an idea is repugnant to medical science, how do you explain the whole hideous story?

Write soon and tell me.

Your loving brother,

TOM.

P.S.—It is a coincidence—an interesting coincidence—that the fatal wound on poor Barton's head corresponded exactly, or almost exactly, with a terrible bruise I saw on the head of Israel Hoffmann.





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TO Anthony Vaina
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N.B.—This Form must accompany any inquiry made respecting this Telegram.

A TELEGRAPH MYSTERY.

WRITTEN FROM THE OPERATOR'S NOTES.

By W. B. Northrop.

Illustrated by H. H. Flere.

OPPOSITE the west front of the General Post Office there stood, not many years ago, a small house, one room of which was let to certain clerks occupied in the Central Telegraph Office, who there congregated once a week for purposes of social intercourse.

On these occasions it was customary for someone to read a paper upon some topic of interest to the assembly, after which the names of all present would be written upon separate slips of paper, placed in a deep bowl, and one of these slips selected, at random, by an appointed person. The one whose name had been chosen was requested to prepare the next paper.

When a paper had been read, it was handed over to the secretary of the club—which had received the name of "The Tell-tale Bowl"—who kept the manuscripts until the end of the year, at which time a committee awarded a prize to the writer whose experience was considered the most interesting.

Owing to certain changes taking place in the Central Telegraph Office, the club was dissolved after an existence of six years, and the various members abandoned the idea of meeting elsewhere. Not long ago, the house in which "The Tell-tale Bowl" members used to meet was removed for the purpose of improvements upon the west front of the Post Office, and during the demolition one of the workmen found a tin box hidden away under the flooring of the room in which the club formerly assembled. This box contained many manuscripts, one of which was marked "Prize for year 18—, awarded to F—— G——, Honourable President of 'The Tell-tale Bowl.'"

This remarkable story has come into my possession, and here it is:—

I am a telegraphist—I have been one for thirteen years. I am not a superstitious man—rather the other way—having always laughed at ghost stories, omens, premonitions, and so forth, putting them down to a diseased mental faculty on the part of the believer. I had been brought up to regard superstitious people as "afflicted."

I held this opinion until something a little out of the natural way came directly under my own observation. I must confess

to being more or less a convert to the other side since the strange event happened which I am about to relate. I do not claim it was positively supernatural, or anything of that sort. *I* myself might have become "afflicted." But strange it was, and I have never been able to account for it.

I had occupied the position of telegraph operator for four years in one of the London offices, doing the ordinary work of the "Met.," or Metropolitan district, when I was placed where I had a great deal of the press work to handle, and was kept "on the go" nearly all the time. I worked until 2.45 every morning, going on duty at 7.30 at night.

One night, just as I was about to go off duty, a rather peculiar dispatch came over the wires. It was addressed to a man living in the East End somewhere, and all it said was "Look out." It was signed simply with the initial "H." This was the last message I received before going off duty, for, owing to sickness at my home, I had received permission to go home early on this particular evening. Placing the message in the "cage," or rack, I called the check boy, and reported off duty, going directly home.

Before going to bed that night, I happened to step out into the hall, and my attention was attracted by a light in the bath-room, the door of which stood partly open. Looking into the room, I saw no one, but found that a lamp had been left burning. This was somewhat unusual, so I stepped into the room to put the lamp out. One of the taps of the water tank was turned on a trifle, and a little water dripped upon the bottom of the bath.

Somehow or other, this dripping caught my attention, and, before leaving the room, just as I had blown out the lamp, I stopped and listened. The drops from the tap seemed to come in a peculiar, irregular, jerky way; and, as I paused, I said to myself, almost mechanically, "That sounds to me like a message." Then I read off the drop—drop; drop—drop—drop; and, sure enough, when I put it all together, it *was* a message. It repeated several times, "Look out; look out," and then there would be a pause, followed by just the initial "H." I did not like this exactly, for it seemed I was allowing my fancy, or imagination, to master me. I struck a match and relit the lamp. I then sat upon the edge of the bath and looked carefully at the tap. I watched the drops, and carefully went over the message, which came fast and often.

I could not, at first, remember where I had heard that message before. We operators receive so many messages of different descriptions—ciphers, and what not—that it is seldom a telegram finds its way into the inner consciousness, so to speak; they come and go by thousands. Suddenly, it dawned upon me that the water was making the same message I had taken just before leaving the office. I laughed at myself, and concluded that the water only sounded that way to me because it was the last dispatch I had received. But, still, I could not get the sound of that water out of my head, nor could I desist from coupling it with the message.

Another telegraphist had a room downstairs, and something possessed me to go down and get him to come and listen to the thing. The hour was now very late, and, of course, he had retired. He growled naturally at being thus disturbed, but, after a little persuasion, agreed to come upstairs with me.

I did not tell him what I had made the message out to be, but waited until he should hear it himself. He listened, and then said, instantly, "Why, 'tis a message! It says, 'Look out! look out!' and it is signed plain 'H.'" I told him that was how I also read it.

We both listened and watched for some little time. He wondered whence it had come, and to whom it was addressed; but I could not remember the name of the man to whom it had been sent—the name being a very peculiar one, Spanish in sound—and I did not tell my companion that I had received a message with the same words before leaving the office.

After laughing over the affair, my friend left me and again retired. I went to my room, but, feeling a little nervous, I did not go to bed, but sat up thinking over the matter. Finally, however, I arose from my table, where I had been sitting, went over to the mirror, and started to take off my tie, preparatory to undressing.

I was looking straight in the mirror, and pondering over the mysterious message, when, right in the room behind me, sitting at the table in the place I had just occupied, I saw a man writing. I was too astonished to turn around and face him. I could not take my eyes off his reflection in the glass.

The figure was that of a tall, slender man. His face was very colourless—looked more like putty than flesh and blood—and I noticed great dark rings under his eyes. I had seen a face like his at the Morgue once, and the green tint under the eyes of the corpse was exactly the same colour as that of the dark rings under the eyes of the man whose reflection I was looking at. As I looked, he took up my pen from the table and commenced writing, or rather printing, something on a large piece of blotting-paper which rested on the table. I watched his hand, and saw it trace a large "L." Then came two "O's," and then a "K." He then wrote another large "O," followed by a "U" and then a "T," which last letter he crossed heavily and put a period after. Then there was a pause, and he seemed to hesitate a long time. I knew perfectly well what the next letter would be—and it *was* a "H."

The figure then arose; and, not seeming to know I was anywhere in the room, or turning to look at me, or even to raise its head, it passed, without a sound, from the room through the open door into the hall.

I stood looking in the glass at the reflection of the door, too astonished to move, expecting to see the form return at any moment from the darkness of the hall.

The apparition did not return, however, and I managed to muster sufficient courage to step over to the blotting-pad to see what had been written. What was my amazement to find—not a word!

I went to the door and closed it softly, taking care to lock it as quickly as I could. I sat down bewildered, and wondering if I had not been asleep all this time, or what had happened.

How long I sat in this semi-dazed condition I do not know; but, presently, I heard the birds chirping outside, and knew that day had come. In my excited condition of mind, it was impossible to think of sleeping. I felt feverish, so I went to the window and opened it for a breath of cool air.

I looked down into the deserted street. At so early an hour, scarcely anyone is seen on the streets, and the footsteps of a passer-by will echo from house to house. I could have heard anyone coming down the street fifty yards away; yet, while I looked into the clear, steel-blue light of the coming day, I saw a man walking on the opposite pavement. His feet, as he walked briskly along, made not the slightest sound, and I wondered much at this, for he walked with an apparently unrestrained and heavy step. As he drew immediately opposite my window, he seemed to slacken his pace. His back was partly turned toward me at first, as if he did not wish to be recognised; but, suddenly, he turned his face up, and looked directly at me. Our eyes met. There was an anxious expression on his face, and he waved his arm in the direction of the East End. What was my surprise to behold my strange visitant of the night!

Desperate at these mysteries, I leaned far out of the window and, as he walked away, called loudly after him. Whether he did not hear me, or did not care to notice me, I know not, but he paid no attention to my loud call—in fact, did not even look back, and I watched him go up the street until he disappeared around a corner.

I ran downstairs and out into the street intending to follow him. I reached the corner he had turned long before he could have arrived at the next street at the pace at which he was walking,



"AT THE TABLE IN THE PLACE I HAD JUST OCCUPIED I SAW A MAN WRITING"

but I could see him nowhere. Even had he hastened, he could not have passed out of sight so quickly.

As it was out of the question to think of going back to the house to sleep, I turned in the direction of the office, doing this mechanically. One will naturally turn toward the place which he usually frequents; and, in moments of excitement, we find we have gone almost unconsciously either to our homes or places of business. As I hurried along, a few early risers passed me, and one or two looked back at me curiously. I must have appeared excited, for my tie was loose, and the sitting up all night had not improved my appearance.

When I arrived at the office, of course, everyone was surprised to see me. I was not due till the evening. I explained that I was very nervous and could not sleep. I went to the message files, and looked over the forms for the message signed with the initial "H." After a considerable search I found the address on our duplicate office-copy, and something prompted me to go over to the East End. Of course, I knew it would be very officious for me to ask any questions of the recipient of the message; but, anyway, I decided to go over and take a look at the house.



"WHAT WAS MY SURPRISE TO SEE MY STRANGE VISITANT OF THE NIGHT BEFORE."

As I walked rapidly along, I eagerly looked into the faces of all whom I saw, in a kind of fearful expectation of meeting the man I had seen twice already within a few hours, but with whom I had not been able to speak. When within a few houses of the number to which the message was addressed, I saw, down the street, and in about the section where the house would be, a great crowd of people. As I edged in among the throng, several stopped me and asked questions. I suppose they took me to be a detective. I told them I knew nothing of what had happened.

I worked my way through the crowd until I reached the door of a large tenement house, near which were gathered some of the motley, ragged, poverty-stricken types of the neighbourhood. Two policemen were keeping the crowd back from this door. One of these officers I happened to know, and I asked him what was the trouble. He replied—

"A horrible murder has just been committed in this house. You may go in if you like, but you won't stay long." I passed in and was conducted by a second policeman up a flight of rickety stairs.

As I entered a small room on the first floor, a most terrible sight met my eyes. I cannot describe it to you. Even now, as I recount this experience, my heart sickens. Suffice it to say that the body of a man was lying on the floor.

The face was mutilated beyond recognition. Blood was everywhere. A pool of it had trickled out along the floor and become dammed up at the threshold. A basin was upon the floor beside the body.

I turned away, almost fainting. Something about the body fascinated me, however, and riveted my attention. I became convinced that I had somewhere seen the man before. Of course, the face was too disfigured for me to recognise anyone; but the figure seemed very, very familiar to me. I closely watched the policeman as he searched the clothing for marks of identification. I was about to turn from the room, when the officer discovered in a pocket in the dead man's vest a thin

folded piece of tissue paper. He opened it. It was the telegram. It read, "Look out," and was signed "H." I recognised at a glance the message. It was in my handwriting. I have attached it to this manuscript, as it came into my possession later on.

I staggered from the room, and, passing out into the street, took the first 'bus going in the direction of the Central Office, the 'busses having commenced running by this time. At the office I told my story to one of my fellow-telegraphists, and showed him the office-copy of the message. He was rather doubtful, however, and seemed to think I had allowed my imagination to get the better of me. So, after that, I told the tale to no one.

Before long, the office was besieged by detectives trying to obtain a clue to the murder. Questions were put to me, the files were examined, and all the usual promising preliminary detective-work gone through with. The message had been sent from Louth.

After weeks spent in fruitless search, and after no less than a dozen people suspected of the crime had been arrested, the detectives seemed to acknowledge themselves baffled, and gave up.

I kept wondering all the time why I had been picked out as the one around whom the strange occurrence was made to revolve, and the apparition—if such it were—and the murdered man were in my thoughts constantly. No one seemed to know who the man was, or what he looked like. The woman who kept the lodging-house in which the murder had been committed had only seen the murdered man once—the day he engaged and paid for the room—and, as he had paid two weeks in advance, she had not, as she put it, "bothered with him at all, at all, afther that." No sound was heard in his room when the deed was committed. The room being right over the hall passage had made this possible, provided, of course, a great noise was not made; and no one was seen to leave or enter the house with blood upon his clothes.



"'A HORRIBLE MURDER HAS JUST BEEN COMMITTED IN THIS HOUSE,' SAID THE POLICEMAN."

Six months passed. The mystery was still unsolved, when, one night, while seated at my instrument, receiving, in one of the district offices to which I had asked to be transferred, a tall man entered the room, and, stepping up to the desk near the window, took down a form and started to write. His back was toward me, and I could only, at a glance, make out his figure, unless I turned completely around in my seat. Presently he finished writing his message and came up to the counter. Being alone in the office at the time, I had to take his message. As he came toward me, I turned my switch, and went to meet him at the counter. What was my astonishment upon looking up to see it was the apparition!

You may well imagine my consternation. The man—if it were a man—noticed my surprised look, and seemed in his turn to be surprised; nay, even alarmed. On his

coming quite close to me I noticed that the face was more fleshy-looking than that of the man who had written at my table on that eventful night, and whom I had seen in the street at dawn. His forehead was lower, too, and more brutal in shape; nor did his eyes have the great dark rings about them that *that* had.

I took the message with as much composure as I could command. As I was counting the words, one of the other operators came in. I excused myself a moment, and went over to the operator. I told my co-worker, in as quiet and natural a voice as I could assume under my excitement, that the man was connected in some mysterious way with the great Whitechapel murder, and that he must be apprehended.

The man eyed us a little suspiciously for a moment, and, noticing that he observed us, we stopped talking. I came back to the counter. While I pretended to be getting the message ready for sending, my companion left the office in order to find a policeman.

I tried to gain time by engaging the man in conversation, but he did not seem inclined to talk. He started to move out, even before he had paid for the message, and I saw at once that it was his intention to escape. I stepped from behind the counter and approached him. I touched him on the arm and said, "Beg pardon, but are you not Mr. Atkins?" This was, of course, a mere pretext to detain him, and he saw through it at once. With an oath, he turned upon me. His hand darted out like lightning and seized me by the throat.

"You scoundrel," he hissed between his teeth. "You are trying to catch me." His eyes glared like those of a demon. He pressed his thumb into the front of my neck until my windpipe was nearly wrenched from its position. I became unconscious.



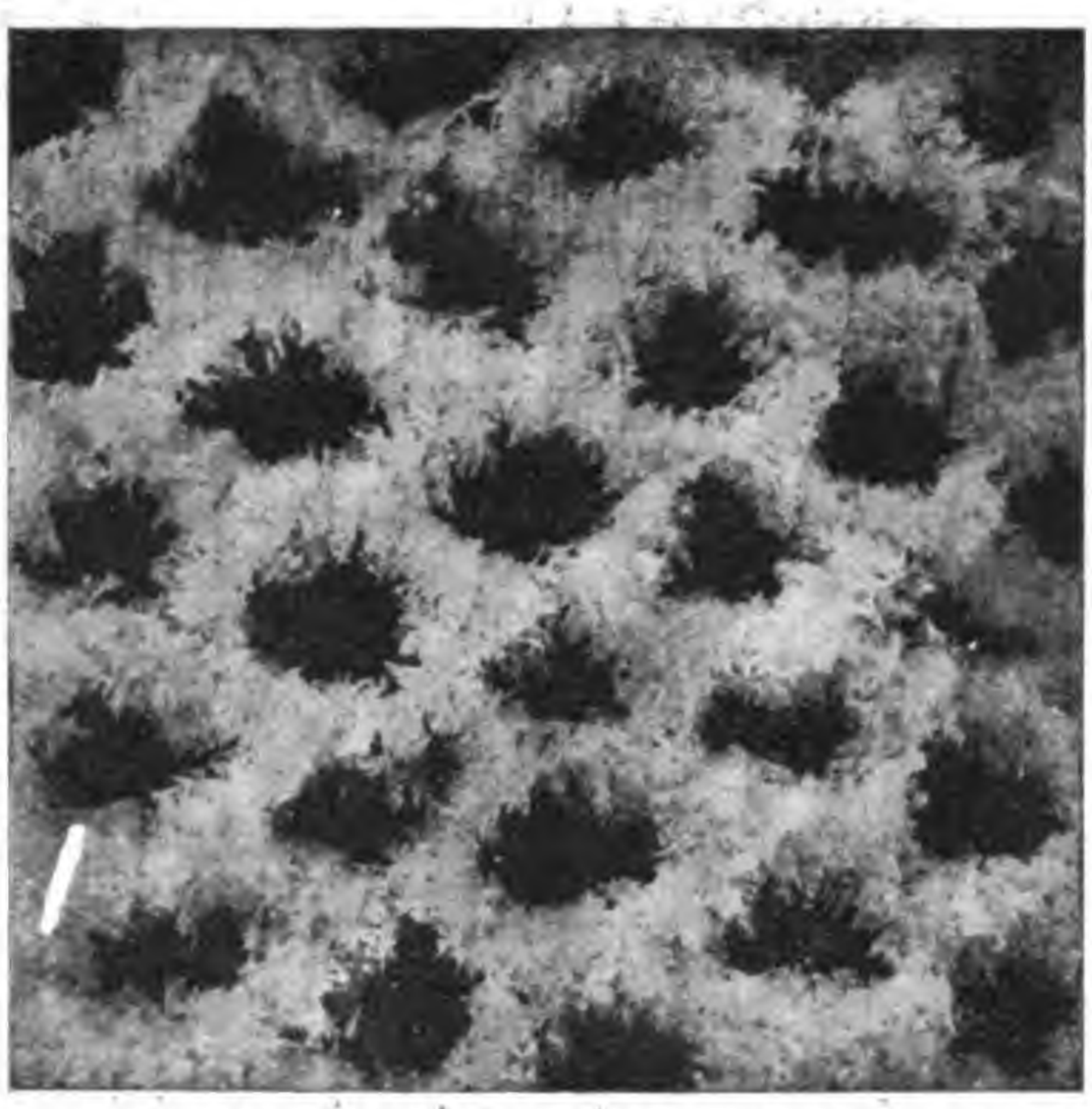
"HE SEIZED ME BY THE THROAT AND HISSED, 'YOU ARE TRYING TO CATCH ME.'"

When I "came to," I found myself in a room in a hospital. I was told that I had been nearly murdered by the stranger, but that he had been capured just in time. n gaol the captive ad confessed to being the perpetrator of the murder in the Whitechapel house. He was sentenced to death. Before his death, he confessed the details of the crime and its motive. It appeared that the man Anthony Usina had been invited to Louth by his (the murderer's) brother. That the prisoner and Usina had quarrelled over a sum of money owing from the murdered man to his murderer, and that they had actually had a fight, in which the murderer had received a severe beating at the hands of Usina. The murderer had sworn revenge; and when, a few days after the fight, Usina had left for London, the man who had received the drubbing determined to follow him. The murderer's brother—an eminently respectable man in Louth—knowing the intentions and disposition of the murderer, had tried to argue with him, and keep him in Louth; but the murderer had eluded him and come up to London. He had also obtained Usina's address.

The brother of the murderer knew well that there would be trouble, and so soon as he learned that the intending murderer had gone to London, he wired the victim to be upon his guard, sending the message which I have shown you.

Strange to say, the sender of the message dropped dead from a stroke of apoplexy a few hours after he sent it. In the meantime, the murderer had found his victim and slain him in the manner described, mutilating him in order to escape identification. The murderer evidently did not know that his victim had received the message. It is strange that the victim did not prepare for the coming danger. Perhaps, however, he was taken by surprise.

Of course, had the murderer's brother been living, he might have brought the perpetrator of the crime to justice; though it is a question whether or not he would have cared to be instrumental in his own brother's apprehension. As it was, the apoplectic stroke was most timely for the purposes of the murderer, as it removed the only man who knew anything of the quarrel between the murderer and his victim.



REMARKABLE APPEARANCE OF FROST ON A WIRE FENCING.

The strangest fact of all was this: The murderer and his brother were twins, the resemblance being most striking. Now, while the man who died of apoplexy might not have given his brother up had he been alive, still, the prevention of the crime was the one thought upon his mind at the time of his death, and the sending of the message was probably the last act of his life. It is a very strange thing that he should have thus proved the actual means of identification of the murderer; for, had I never seen the appearance, I would never have been able to identify the man. The man who came into the office that night was the image of the man whom I had seen writing at my table, and I would have sworn to his being the same person whom I had seen at dawn on the street a few hours afterwards.

Psychologists explain the apparition on the ground that the one thought in the mind of the man who died of apoplexy was to prevent his brother from committing the crime about which I have told you. This being the case, his spirit could not rest until it had induced me to hasten over to the East End and prevent the deed. This accounts for the very anxious expression I observed on the face of the man I saw down in the street that morning.

However, all the ghost's anxiety was in vain.

I do not believe, as I said before, in all these ghost stories and the like, and I still maintain that a great deal of it comes from giving too free a play to one's imagination. I cannot, however, attempt to explain it all away; nor would I if I could. I can only tell you what has actually happened to me. I only know what I know.

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THE CURSE OF THE CATSEYE



A TALE OF SINGAPORE TOLD BY THE THIRD MATE.

By Alfred Slade.

Illustrated by Ernest Prater.

IT isn't my yarn at all by rights; the Second Mate commenced it, and pushed me in, in the middle. So I've annexed it; and the Second won't mind—for he's dead.

The *Mother Carey* was not a ship to be proud of. I never knew anyone to blow about belonging to her, not even the donkeyman.

We had worked her round to Sydney all right. Then the Health Authorities ordered us off: after which we went and lay off Thursday Island till the firm who had chartered us could wire instructions.

In desperation, our people wired us to go to Singapore in ballast and get any sort of cargo there we could.

I was sorry to leave Thursday Island; the telegraph stationmaster there had a daughter. Her first name was Mary, and, if I can manage it, one of these days her second will be the same as mine.

We got a move on us and were well in the Straits by eight bells that afternoon, and it being the First Mate's watch, the Second Mate came to my cabin to smoke a bit.

"Ever been to Singapore?" he asked.

"No," I said; "never went further than Calcutta that way. Have you?"

"Yes," he answered; "it'll be just about three years ago."

"Nice place?" I asked.

"Terrible hole," he answered. "See that stone? I got that there."

I took the ring off his finger and examined it; it was worth looking at, too. Not for the mounting, which was ordinary enough, but for the jewel it held. I had never seen a stone like it before, and never again since—but I'll tell that part by-and-by.

It was something like a catseye, this jewel; but the outside was perfectly white, the interior was peculiarly greenish, and right in the centre was a spot of dazzling red like a speck of living blood. The general effect was one of a baleful fascination, repellent and at the same time invincibly attractive; and as I looked, I shuddered, yet could not turn my eyes away.

"That's the way it serves me," said the Second, who was observing. "I hate the thing, and yet I can't throw it away. And ever since I've had it, it's brought nothing but bad luck.

"I was on the *Sardanapalus* when I had the stone first; we were caught in a monsoon in the Indian Ocean, and had to put in at Point de Galle an absolute wreck. My next ship was the *Golden Horn;* the cargo caught fire off Pernambuco, and we were taken off by one of the Brazilian Royal Mails. This'll be third trip; and I shall not live to finish it. I only hope you others'll get through all right."

"How did you come by it?" I asked, beginning, I confess, to feel a little uneasy.

"It was a rum go," answered the Second, "and I don't much like talking about it. But," he added after a moment's reflection, "I'll tell you, in case anything happens to me *there.*" And he nodded ahead, where lay Singapore.

"The last time I was there," he went on, "I ran amuck. It was one of Libby's liners I was in, and you know what they are. Rations according to the Act, and as much rum as you can put on a mosquito's left eyelid. So when I went ashore with a couple of dollars I'd subbed from the skipper, I didn't want much to upset me. A bottle of Hamburg square-face soon did the trick; and before I knew where I was I found myself half-seas over.

"It was in one of those shanties back of the garrison barracks where I'd got the stuff; in the daytime respectable merchants' depôts, at night half grog-shop and half opium-den. The long, low, narrow room was divided into two by strips of bamboo matting; I was in the front part at a sort of rude table, alone with my square-face; the back was filled with a crowd of Parsees, squatting in a circle, and gabbling. Between us was a hole for the ladder that went to the cellar, whence came the oppressing fumes of opium; and at the back of the inner room was a door in the wooden wall, opening on a staircase that led to the apartments above.

"I remember all that distinctly; but I don't remember much else. Alone with the noise and smoke and the intoxicating smell of the East that lay all around me, and stupefied by the atmosphere no less than by drink, I must have rested long in a sort of dream.

"I seemed to wake and shiver, and, sitting up, saw the dawn rising in flames of gold. On the floor were people sleeping. I tried to stand up, but felt languid and oppressed, and I sank in my seat, and would have gone to sleep again.

"Then the door from above opened, and a girl came down. And all at once, in spite of myself, and in a manner I cannot explain, all my languor left me and a fever filled my veins. I rose, and, walking across the sleeping bodies, went near to her, threw aside her veil, bent down, and kissed her on the mouth.

"She did not move or speak; only a shudder went through her, and it was not of fear or aversion.

"I drew from her at last, and, the light creeping up through the windows, could look at her.

"She was not a Malay; she was not, I thought, a Hindoo: something of a Cingalese, a Cingalese of the hill-tops, nearly white, of features almost classic, a nose finely Hebraic, and eyes of an Aryan gipsy.

"'I have been watching you,' she said, in perfect English; 'watching and waiting. Did you not feel the incense in your nostrils—that was my love-spell. And it has worked.'

"Again I stooped and kissed her.

"'I like that,' she said, with a little laugh. 'It is a good thing of the white men's. See, I will try to act thus also,' and she in her turn had reached up and kissed me.

"I leaned forward to seize her, but she slid through my grasp and had flown up the stairs.

"'To-night,' she whispered, 'by the old pagoda, I will weave you another love-spell.'

"Then she came down a step. 'Look well to yourself



"I THREW ASIDE HER VEIL AND KISSED HER."

here,' she whispered again; 'there is danger. Take this—it is an amulet—it will protect you,' and she had flown away out of sight, leaving in my hand a tiny square of ivory hollowed through the centre.

"I stood for a minute as in a trance; between my feet I saw a body, and, as I looked, one of its eyes, it seemed, was watching me.

"Had it been there all the while? I did not think so. Yet, looking again, it was not watching me at all; its eyes were firmly closed, and it was sleeping. Yet a fear crept into my heart, and instinctively I felt in my belt for my revolver. It was not there; it was not on the table; it was nowhere.

"And all my courage went from me, and I staggered across the sleeping men and burst through the fragile door and fell out into the sun. And without stopping I ran as hard as I could to the ship, sweating with a terror I dare not think about.

"The boatswain was washing down with the steam hose; I stripped and stood in front of it and took a bath that way. It steadied my nerves, and the bright sea and the bright sunshine did the rest.

"I was at the pagoda that night, sober, without even a cigar, but with another pistol in my belt. It was a weird place.

"Not a soul was in sight. The pagoda was dark and empty. The only sound I could hear was the ripple of the waves on the distant shore.

"All sorts of fancies crept into my brain; I tried in vain to put them away. At last I tried to go. I could not; I was as if rooted to the spot.

"I looked around and fancied I was going mad, and I laughed. And the echoes came back from all around, so that the air seemed full of mocking devils, and I turned round and round to see whence came the sound.

"There was a figure bowing before me, and a voice said: 'Salaam, Sahib,' and in front, by the light of the moon, I saw a man.

"'I have a token for my lord,' he said, 'from one he loves, who begs him to accept it and so depart,' and he handed me the stone you have seen.

"'Stop,' I cried, taking it. 'Are you her servant?'

"'The Flower of the Cinnamon was my daughter,' he answered, 'but now—no longer.'

"'What do you mean?' I cried again.

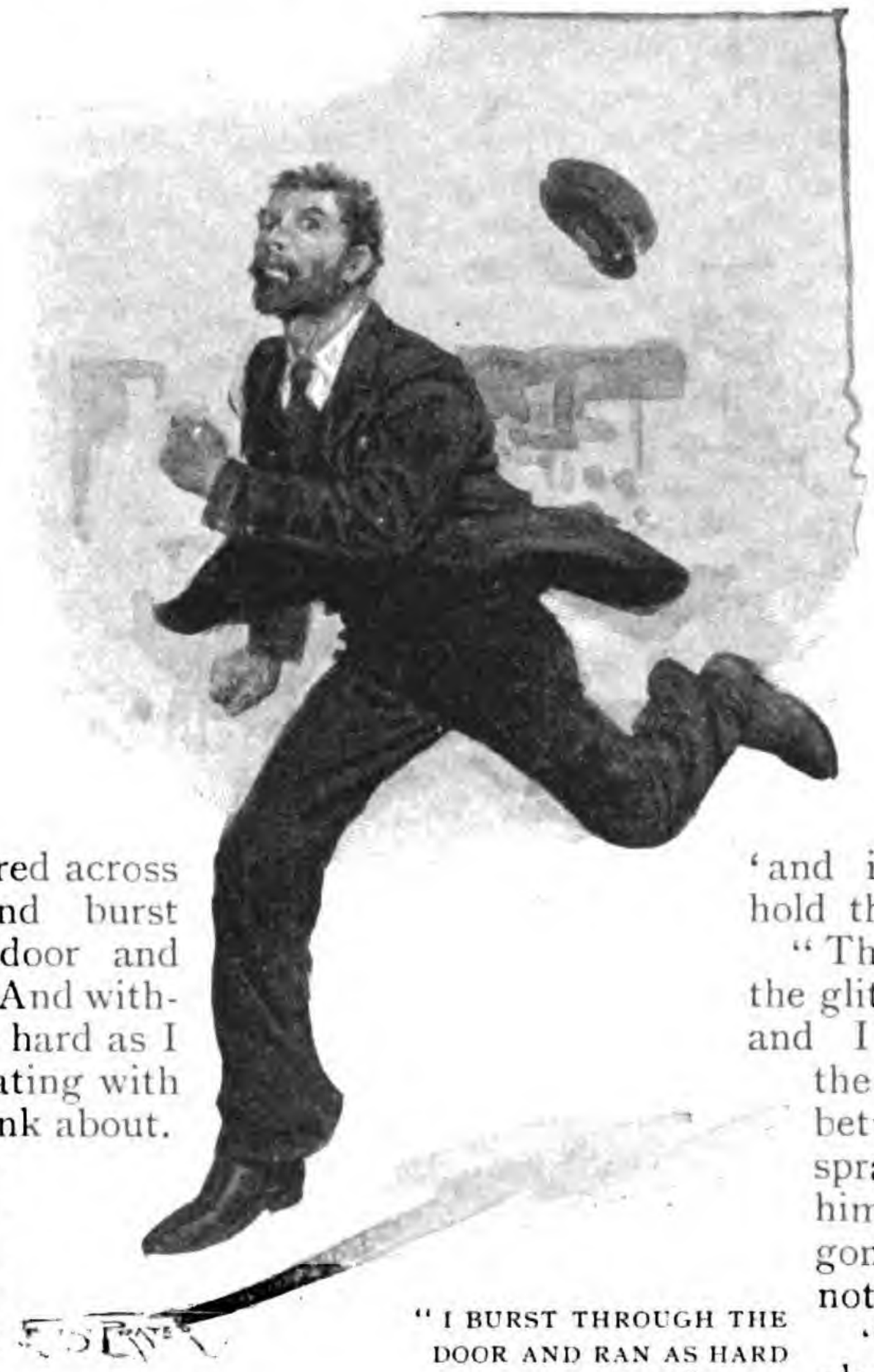
"'The Flower of the Cinnamon *is not*,' he said; 'and in your hand you hold the token.'

"The moonlight caught the glitter of his evil eye, and I saw then it was the man who had lain between my feet. I sprang forward to seize him, and he was gone; gone like the wind, with not a trace behind.

"In my hand I still clenched the pebble; I took it in my fingers to put it in my pocket. There was the other token, my amulet of ivory. I took it out to look at it, and its veins were red—red with the streaks of blood.

"So I went back to the ship, walking warily and looking behind my shoulder; but I saw nothing and felt nothing—nothing but the stone the man had given me, that lay like a weight on my heart. It was there next morning, but my ivory amulet I could not find; it was gone, and with it, I knew, my salvation."

"That is all?" I asked the Second, as he stopped to wipe the sweat from his forehead.



"I BURST THROUGH THE DOOR AND RAN AS HARD AS I COULD."

"All—at present," he answered, "for we sailed that same morning. And I have never seen her since. And I never shall see her," he added, in a tone that made me feel cold to hear.

"But you kept the stone?" I asked again.

"I could not get rid of it," he replied. "Once—you may believe me or not, as you like—once, I took it from my waistcoat pocket and threw it over the bulwarks. It did not touch the sea; next morning it was there again in my pocket. So I made the best of what I knew was a bad job; I got it mounted in London in a ring, and I wear it so in defiance."

There was more of fear than defiance in his eyes just then; he swung on his heel and turned away; nor did any further allusions to the subject pass between us.

We reached Singapore shortly afterwards; and I noticed the Second Mate getting more and more nervous. He tried to hide it and to conquer it, he worked harder than any man on the boat.

At last we had got our cargo in and had finished coaling; the next morning we should (machinery permitting) clear out for home. The Second seemed easier that evening, but he had scarcely been in my cabin half an hour when a convulsive spasm seemed to shoot through him. He stood up, as if in agony, and cried out in a thick guttural voice: "I've got to go," and made towards the alley-way.

I tried to stop him; he dragged me along as easily as if I had been a child. Then, nearing the gangway, he shook me off and cried: "You had better keep out of it; I shall be enough," and passed over the gangway to the quay.

I went after him, just speaking to the watchman; yet even this delay put me far behind, and I had to run to overtake him, so quickly did he walk.

At last we reached the house, and the room he had described: he ordered liquor, which I took care not to drink; and in desperate defiance let his hand lie on the table, stretching out the finger that held the ring.

Strive as I might to keep my head clear, I felt the fumes of the place suffocating me; yet, stupefied as I was, I had a consciousness that myriad eyes were around and watching us.

Below, through the hole where the ladder went, I saw the opium smokers; at the back where the staircase mounted, I saw the door open.

A woman entered, and at once the place seemed empty, save for her and us.

The Second was looking too, and started suddenly. He got up and walked towards her and threw her heavy veil aside. Then, in a voice so calm that it astonished me, he said—

"You are not Flower of the Cinnamon?"

"No," she answered, "the Flower is not. But when she *was*, she was my sister."

And she pressed forward towards me. "I am called," she said, to me, not to him, "I am called the Sheen of Morning." And she made a low obeisance towards me.

I did not speak, but looked towards her, looked passed her and saw into the cellar. I saw a man, dark-skinned, yet no Hindoo, kindle a fire on the ground; and as the flames leaped red, he sprinkled a powder on them and the fire burnt green, and the smoke came through the opening.

The woman was still bowed before me and watching me with entreating eyes; but now the lustre went out of her eyes and they had no more life in them than a sleep-walker's. Then she rose stiffly and walked backward to the staircase door and so passed through; and the door shut of itself, for I saw no one to shut it.

And the man, or devil, in the cellar put more powder on his fire, and the flames burnt red, red as a bullock's blood. And the Second turned slowly round and walked from the room into the street; and, looking neither to the right nor the left, took his way still further across the marsh. And I followed, shivering in my heart.

Nothing before or around us but the darkness and the heat of the night that brought up the fever-fog; and from the distance came the horrid noise of a Chinese sing-song.

And we still walked on, till, in the darkness of the night, there loomed another darkness, thicker and more compact: and I saw it was the shadow of a pagoda.

The Second led the way right to the entrance; as we reached the threshold, a light sprang up within.

The Second was mounting the steps; I seized his arm and with my whole force tried to retain him; he did not even pause, but dragged me after him as if my strength were nothing. And so we went into the temple.

The light shone from the other end:

we drew closer to it and stood in front. There, on a shrine, was an enormous figure of Buddha, sitting cross-legged, with six arms extended. The light shone from his eyes; and, glancing along his nostrils, on one side sparkled back. In his nose was a jewel the duplicate of that the Second wore; on the other side was a space for a second jewel, which was the Second's.

As I looked, I cried aloud and started back; my hand was still on the Second's arm, and so great was my terror that I drew him back with me a space. At that moment the pavement in front of us opened where but an instant before we had both been standing; and in the void revealed, I felt and smelt, rather than saw, the fœtid moisture of a bottomless water-pit. And the light in the idol's eyes burnt red.

A little finger touched my left hand: I turned. It was a woman, the same woman of the hut; who whispered, so that none but I could hear—

"Come, my lord, and quickly. Leave *him* to his fate, for he is doomed. But thou, while there is yet time, come."

"Yes," I said to her; "but not alone. *He* must come too."

"Does my lord command it?" she asked.

"Yes," I said again.

"Then I will try," she whispered; "yet it is Death we three look in the face."

She raised her hand and rubbed my lips with something she held; something that was cold like menthol, and bitter as gall. She did likewise to the Second, who at that seemed to awake from sleep and stare about him bewildered. And taking me by the hand, and I the Second, she led us to the door; and the door was shut and barred, and the light in the idol went out.

"There is another way," she said at last, and led us on; till behind a pillar she stopped and stooped, and, groping for some time, found at last a rude staple in the stonework.

"Pull," she said, "for you are strong." And I pulled, and the stone came round on invisible hinges. In the opening there disclosed I felt rough-hewn steps that went down, and pushing myself through I descended. Three steps I counted, and then there were no more; and I lost my hand-hold and fell. I threw out my hands wildly in search of some support; my head swung forward and struck against a projection; and, insensible, I still fell—down, down . . . . . .

When I came to myself I was lying on the ground, my head in the woman's lap; and her hair had torn loose and was swathing my temples; and as she bent to kiss me, I felt that her eyes were wet.

But between her and me came the memory of Mary, and the promise



"HE DRAGGED ME ALONG AS EASILY AS A CHILD."

the moon had seen at Rockhampton; and I did not kiss her back, but took her hand, and said, "My sister, my sister." And so she understood, and raised me up, and put something on my head that cured its aching; and the Second came to my side and held me, and we went on down the passage.

There was no light to guide us; but the walls shone with phosphorescent drawings, and all the vile gods of Buddha's Pantheon served us as horrid guides. We went on—the woman in tears, I in pain, and the Second in terror and dismay—till there came some rough-hewn steps, and these mounted, some stairs of wood; there the woman left us and bade us wait.

Presently she returned and led us still upward, and lifted a flap and let in a flood of light. And springing through, we were in the room of the grog-shop—all alone, save for the invisible eyes that I knew were watching us all around.

And we sat at the table; and I gave my hand to the woman, and said again, "My sister," and she fell to weeping afresh.

I looked towards the Second, and his brow was wet with sweat, and on his finger gleamed ominously the curs-stone.

I tried to get the ring off. It clung till with a wrench I had twisted it and had it off, and left his finger free; and then, before the woman could prevent me, had put it on my own. At that she shrank, shivering; but I knocked the table loudly in summons.

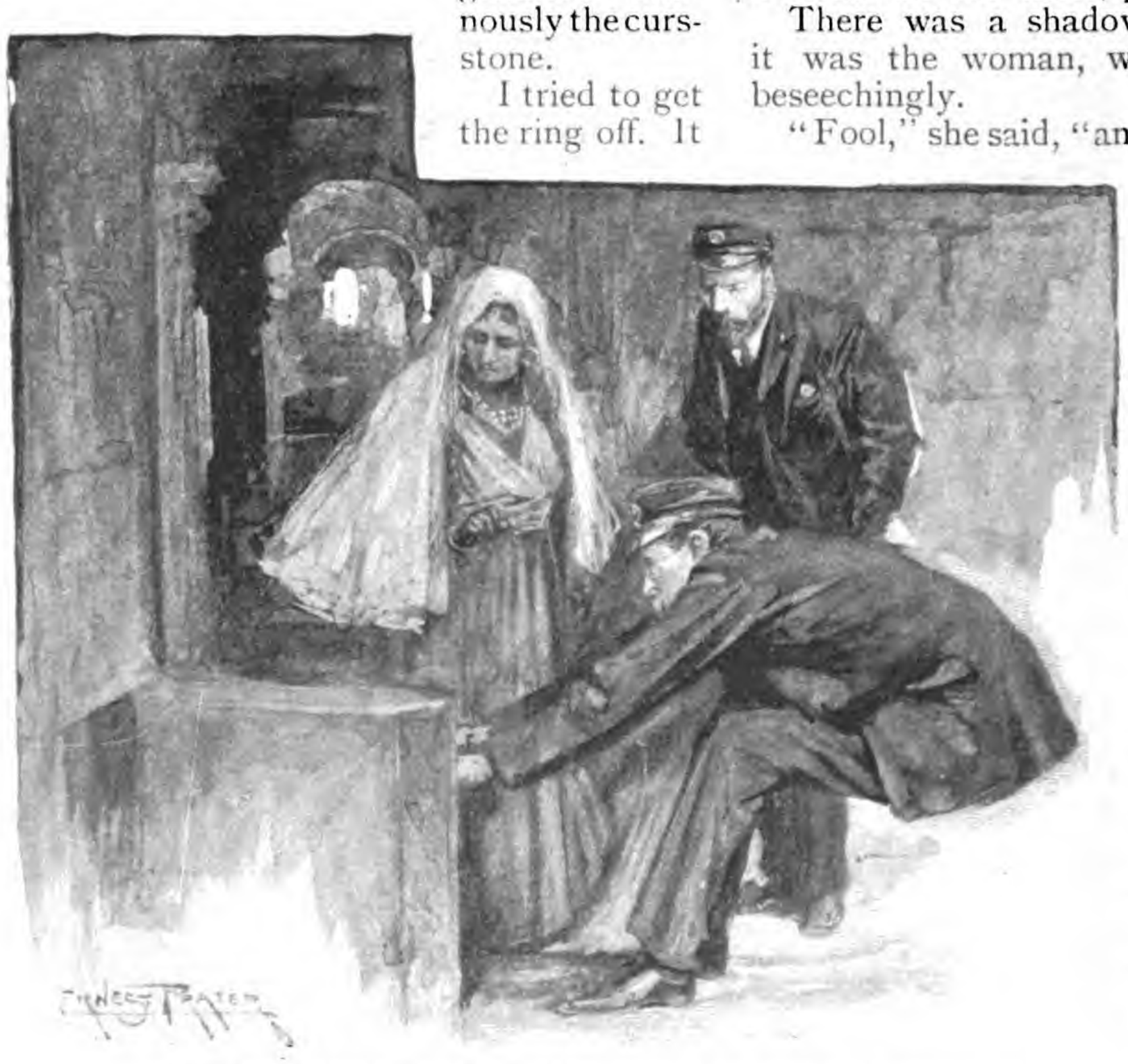
A coolie came in, and I ordered two bottles of Bass; but in knocking and ordering and talking I took care to show my ring. He saw, and smiled maliciously; and coming back with the beer looked again. The woman had disappeared, spirited away again by some invisible power.

So the Second and I drank—he hugely, I scarcely at all. And then I told him my scheme: that he must go back to the ship alone, for without the ring I felt he had nothing to fear. He was reluctant to do so, for he was a brave man; yet his terror was so great that in the end he departed.

So I was left alone with the ring; and waiting till I thought it time, began to reproach myself for running in danger when my life belonged to Mary. Then I thought again: and I knew at last that Mary herself would have me to do this. So I kept up a stout heart, and ostentatiously leaving a dollar on the table, passed out.

There was a shadow in front of me—it was the woman, who fell at my feet beseechingly.

"Fool," she said, "and foolhardy. Throw it away lest it kill you. For it is a vampire that drinks men's blood."



"I PULLED, AND THE STONE CAME ROUND ON INVISIBLE HINGES."

And she took hold of my finger and tried to wrench the ring away; but the flesh was closed up tightly round it, and it would not budge.

"It is the spell already winding round you," she said. "Yet it was not *you* that my father cursed. What shall I do, my love, my love?

"Better throw away your finger than your soul,

she said again; "cut it off and so escape."

I searched for the knife in my belt, but my sheath was empty; and we looked into each other's eyes in hollow despair.

"I would bite it," she cried, "but I cannot—I cannot; for I love you."

"You must not say that," I answered; "and you must not come with me."

"My lord commands?" she asked, in pained humility.

And I said "Yes." And she disappeared into the darkness.

I strode on quickly across the swamp towards the quay, and already I saw the lights gleam in the harbour. Yet even now I could not feel at ease, and would glance round furtively and yet see nothing—until suddenly the moon shot out from behind a cloud, and in front of my eyes was a gleam that was not of light, but a reflection of light. I quickly put out my left hand, and jagged steel pierced it, and I shrieked aloud.



"TAKING THE FINGER THAT HELD THE RING, SHE BIT IT CLEAN THROUGH."

With my right hand I seized my assailant, who was anointed with oil and slipped through my fingers like an eel. Yet he did not run, but remained at a little distance, waiting to attack me again, and there were others with him. By their stiffened upright black hair I saw they were Malays; but the one who seemed their leader was the devil of the cellar. And my heart thumped and thumped, as I waited.

Then a soft hand again touched me, and a voice said, "It is I," and the woman had taken my finger that held the ring, and saying, "Yet I must do it, *because* I love him," had bitten it clean through. And shouting to the men in a tongue I knew not, she hurled it in their midst; and their leader seized it, and yelled aloud in triumph, and showed it to the others running round him.

And the woman spoke again, and to some purpose, for then the men departed with the prize. And the moon went in again behind the clouds.

"Do not slay me, my lord," the woman was saying, "for your life is not yet saved."

She tore the veiling from her face and bandaged the stump that had been my finger; and then she took my other hand, and, withdrawing the dagger, sucked softly at the poison of the wound. But the pain was too much for me, and I just leaned over and fell fainting to the ground.

Next morning, I found myself in my bunk, and the Second was watching over me, and the woman was crouching on the floor.

"That's right, old man," said the Second, "and now I'll fetch the doctor."

The doctor was the chief engineer, who forthwith came aft with a hot iron and seared the stump of my finger.

"And now, laddie, ye'll do," he said; "and I must awa, for there is some leetle difficulty with the boilers."

"She carried you here," said the Second, answering my eyes, "though how she managed it I can't say. And she had sucked the poison clean from your wound, and Mac said there was no danger left. Though, mind you, the kriss had enough on it to kill twenty men.

"Yes," he went on, "I'm all right, and you shall tell me how it happened to you

afterwards. Now you must swallow this sleeping draught Mac's left for you."

And I swallowed the medicine he gave me.

But I did not sleep; I fell into a stupor. I could not move or speak; yet I could hear and understand.

The sailors were clearing the decks above me; at intervals the steam whistle sounded; we were preparing to get under way.

At last came the cry, "All strangers leave the ship," and there was a bustle across the gangway.

The woman in the corner rose, came to my bunk and kissed me on the lips, opened the door, went into the alley-way and on to the deck. She mounted to the poop above my head, then a shadow passed for a moment athwart my port-hole. I heard a splash—and she had done suttee for her love of me.

The blade of the propeller began to revolve, and the ship to forge slowly forward. My tongue was parched and my temples throbbing, and the delirium of fever came over me.

My eyes still open looked far away forward, into the pagoda of Singapore. And before the Buddha knelt the throng of worshippers, and the idol looked down upon them in content and triumph, and in his nostrils were now the catseyes, sparkling on either side. And a shadowy form that I knew for the ghost of the woman came before the god and fell prostrate, and lay there praying for me; and the idol did not frown, but gazed still content; and I knew that the curse was lifted from me.

Then my eyes could close, and the fire went from them, and the darkness came and gentle sleep.



"SHE MOUNTED THE POOP AND JUMPED INTO THE WATER."

The next thing I knew was that Mac was pouring quinine down my throat, and we were out at sea and the sun was shining. And at Aden, where we coaled, was a letter from Mary; and I was well again.

The Second met the fate he feared. You know from the papers how the voyage ended; no one knows, and only I can guess, how it came to end as it did. It was off Ushant, almost in sight of home. The Second had the watch. The moon was at its full; there was not a cloud to cast a shadow. The man at the wheel saw a huge rock loom on the starboard bow. He veered off a point to give it a wide berth; the Second came towards him and took the wheel himself. And then, the man declares, he headed straight for the rock, his eyes fixed intently in front of him, his hands a-tremble with unavailing fear. The man thought he was mad, and tried to tear the spokes away; the Second, with strength almost supernatural, with one hand lifted him up, and hurled him to the lower deck. Then the ship forged on, straight to the rock ahead.

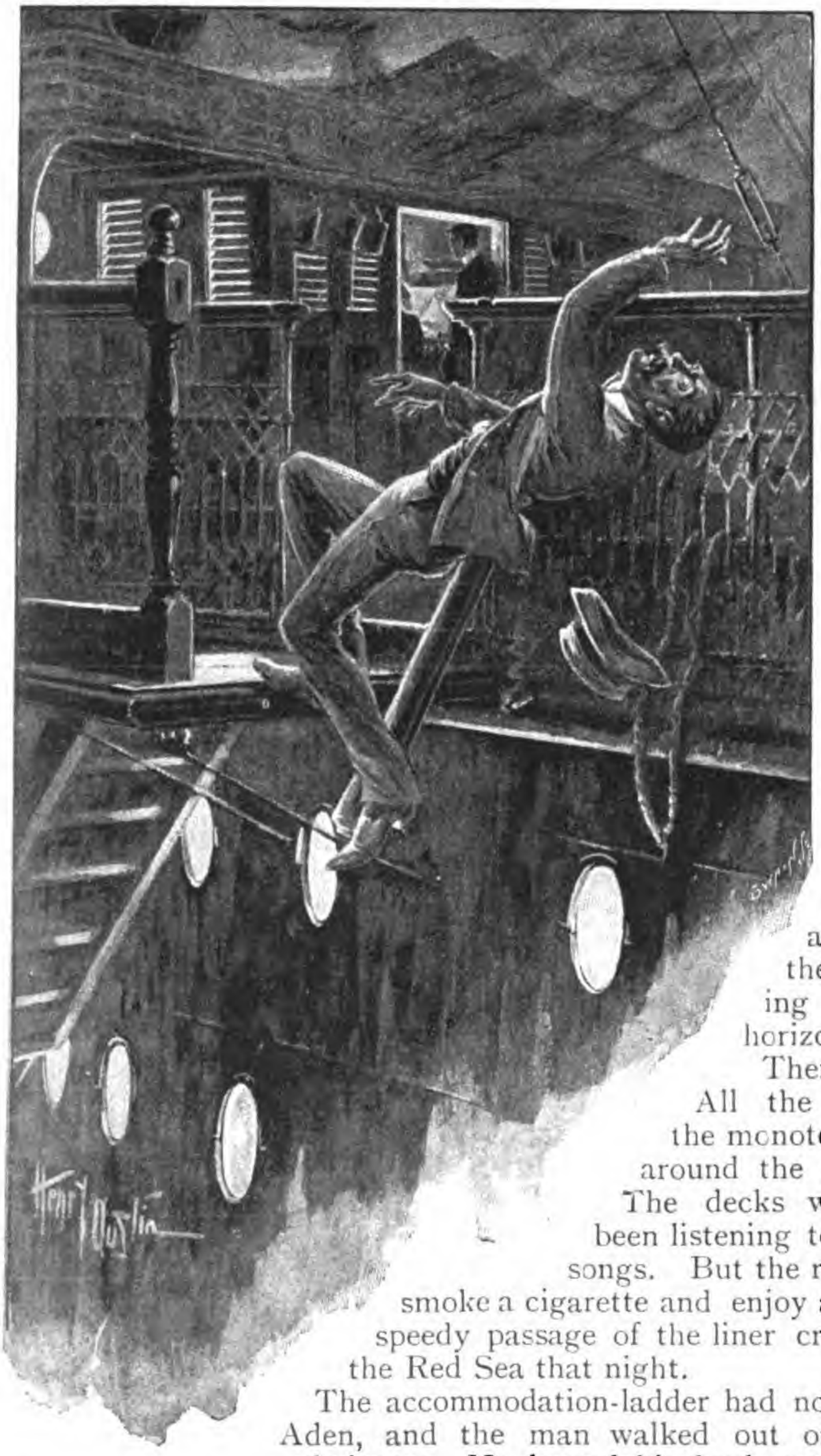
The boats were lowered and quickly filled, and were casting off. I sprang up to the bridge — I touched the Second's arm and took his hand in mine.

As I hurried him down the gangway and across the forehold, a boom of the winch pinned him to the deck and he could not move.

Then, as I live, I saw a woman—a black woman—holding him in her arms, holding him down. There came a rush of water. The vessel slid back into the trough of the sea. The woman kissed him—he shrieked aloud—and the waves sucked them in together.

The curse of the catseye was completed.

"MAN OVERBOARD!"



"THE RAILING GAVE WAY, AND HE FELL BACKWARDS INTO THE SEA WITH A SPLASH."

AN EPISODE OF THE RED SEA.

By Winston Spencer Churchill.*

Illustrated by Henry Austin.

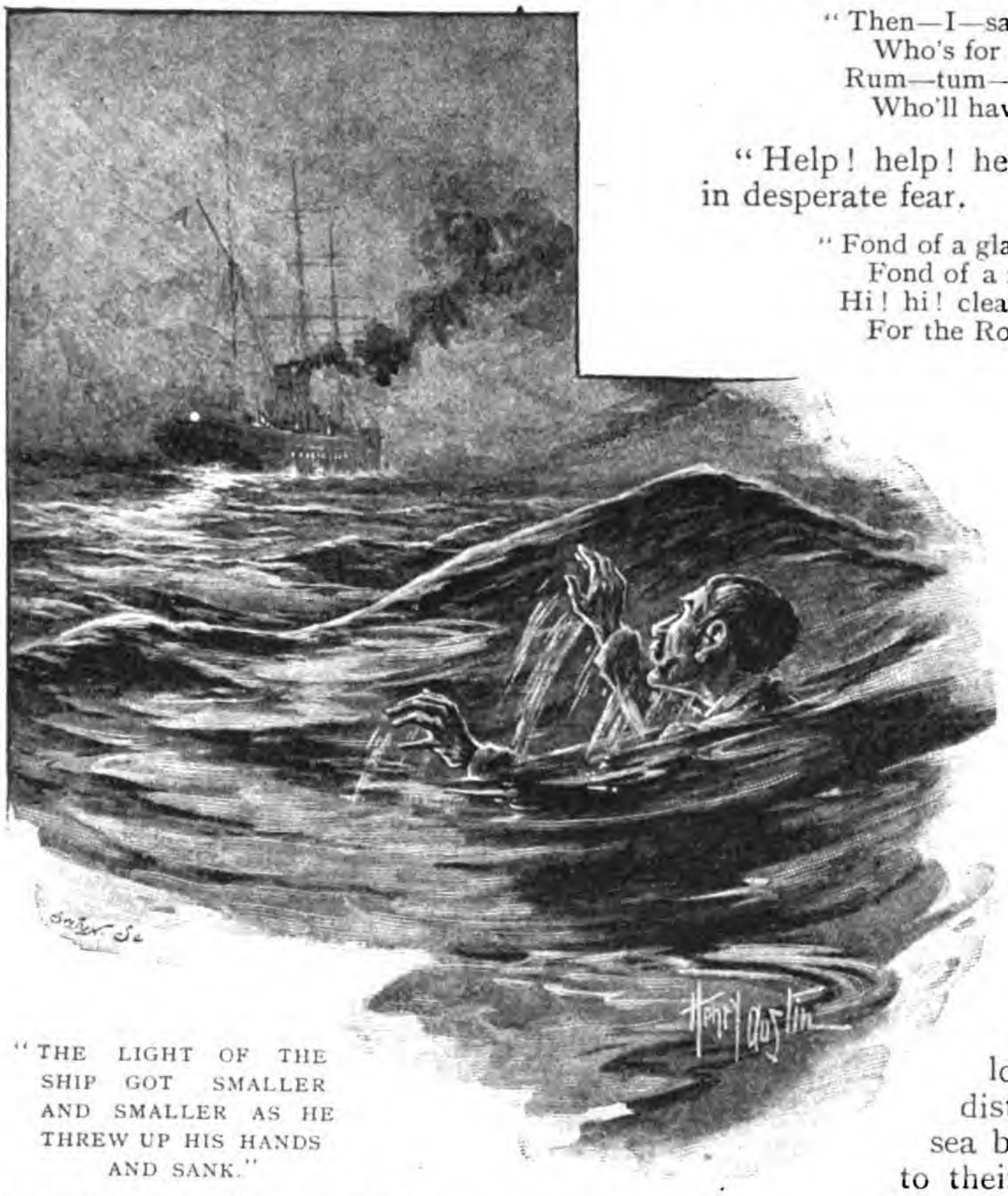
IT was a little after half-past nine when the man fell overboard. The mail steamer was hurrying through the Red Sea in the hope of making up the time which the currents of the Indian Ocean had stolen. The night was clear, though the moon was hidden behind clouds. The warm air was laden with moisture. The still surface of the waters was only broken by the movement of the great ship, from whose quarter the long, slanting undulations struck out, like the feathers from an arrow shaft, and in whose wake the froth and air bubbles churned up by the propeller trailed in a narrowing line to the darkness of the horizon.

There was a concert on board. All the passengers were glad to break the monotony of the voyage, and gathered around the piano in the companion-house. The decks were deserted. The man had been listening to the music and joining in the songs. But the room was hot, and he came out to smoke a cigarette and enjoy a breath of the wind which the speedy passage of the liner created. It was the only wind in the Red Sea that night.

The accommodation-ladder had not been unshipped since leaving Aden, and the man walked out on to the platform, as on to a balcony. He leaned his back against the rail and blew a puff of smoke into the air reflectively. The piano struck up a lively tune, and a voice began to sing the first verse of "The Rowdy Dowdy Boys." The measured pulsations of the screw were a subdued but additional accompaniment. The man knew the song. It had been the rage at all the music halls, when he had started for India seven years before. It reminded him of the brilliant and busy streets he had not seen

* As by a very remarkable coincidence there are two Winston Churchills, both writers, we may mention that this Mr. Churchill is the son of the late Lord Randolph Churchill.

for so long, but was soon to see again. He was just going to join in the chorus, when



"THE LIGHT OF THE SHIP GOT SMALLER AND SMALLER AS HE THREW UP HIS HANDS AND SANK."

the railing, which had been insecurely fastened, gave way suddenly with a snap, and he fell backwards into the warm water of the sea amid a great splash.

For a moment he was physically too much astonished to think. Then he realised that he must shout. He began to do this even before he rose to the surface. He achieved a hoarse, inarticulate, half-choked scream. A startled brain suggested the word "Help!" and he bawled this out lustily and with frantic effort six or seven times without stopping. Then he listened.

"Hi! hi! clear the way
For the Rowdy Dowdy Boys."

The chorus floated back to him across the smooth water, for the ship had already passed completely by. And as he heard the music a long stab of terror drove through his heart. The possibility that he would not be picked up dawned for the first time on his consciousness. The chorus started again—

"Then—I—say—boys,
Who's for a jolly spree?
Rum—tum—tiddley—um,
Who'll have a drink with me?"

"Help! help! help!" shrieked the man, in desperate fear.

"Fond of a glass now and then,
Fond of a row or noise;
Hi! hi! clear the way
For the Rowdy Dowdy Boys!"

The last words drawled out faint and fainter. The vessel was steaming fast. The beginning of the second verse was confused and broken by the ever-growing distance. The dark outline of the great hull was getting blurred. The stern light dwindled.

Then he set out to swim after it with furious energy, pausing every dozen strokes to shout long wild shouts. The disturbed waters of the sea began to settle again to their rest. The widening undulations became ripples. The aërated confusion of the screw fizzed itself upwards and out. The noise of motion and the sounds of life and music died away.

The liner was but a single fading light on the blackness of the waters and a dark shadow against the paler sky.

At length full realisation came to the man, and he stopped swimming. He was alone — abandoned. With the understanding his brain reeled. He began again to swim, only now instead of shouting he prayed — mad, incoherent prayers, the words stumbling into one another.

Suddenly a distant light seemed to flicker and brighten. A surge of joy and hope rushed through his mind. They were going to stop—to turn the ship and come back. And with the hope came gratitude. His prayer was answered. Broken words of thanksgiving rose to his lips. He stopped



"UPRIGHT IN THE WATER, FIFTY YARDS AWAY, WAS A BLACK TRIANGULAR OBJECT—A FIN."

and stared after the light—his soul in his eyes. As he watched it, it grew gradually but steadily smaller. Then the man knew that his fate was certain. Despair succeeded hope. Gratitude gave place to curses. Beating the water with his arms, he raved impotently. Foul oaths burst from him, as broken as his prayers—and as unheeded.

The fit of passion passed, hurried by increasing fatigue. He became silent—silent as was the sea, for even the ripples were subsiding into the glassy smoothness of the surface. He swam on mechanically along the track of the ship, sobbing quietly to himself, in the misery of fear. And the stern light became a tiny speck, yellower but scarcely bigger than some of the stars, which here and there shone between the clouds.

Nearly twenty minutes passed, and the man's fatigue began to change to exhaustion. The overpowering sense of the inevitable pressed upon him. With the weariness came a strange comfort. He need not swim all the long way to Suez. There was another course. He would die. He would resign his existence since he was thus abandoned. He threw up his hands impulsively and sank. Down, down he went through the warm water. The physical death took hold of him and he began to drown. The pain of that savage grip recalled his anger. He fought with it furiously. Striking out with arms and legs he sought to get back to the air. It was a hard struggle, but he escaped victorious and gasping to the surface. Despair awaited him. Feebly splashing with his hands he moaned in bitter misery—

"I can't—I must. O God! let me die."

The moon, then in her third quarter, pushed out from behind the concealing clouds and shed a pale, soft glitter upon the sea. Upright in the water, fifty yards away, was a black triangular object. It was a fin. It approached him slowly.

His last appeal had been heard.

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THE SPECTRE OF THE SEVERN TUNNEL.

AN EXCITING RAILWAY INCIDENT.

By E. Thurlow.

Illustrated by H. H. Flère.

THE train was fast approaching the Severn Tunnel.

I settled myself more comfortably in the corner of the first-class smoking carriage, and glanced at the lamp, glad to find it was burning brightly. A journey is always a wearisome undertaking to me. I am a business man, and grudge the time one spends getting from place to place. On this occasion, however, I was contented. I had left Newport, in Monmouthshire, where I had just spent my yearly holiday, and was returning to my bachelor's quarters in town.

My celibate's life may have made me unsociable, but I confess to rejoicing at the thought that I had procured the apartment to myself for the 150 miles of my journey. I had plenty of papers to help me pass the time, and I was smoking an excellent cigar. What more could any man ask?

Gradually a feeling of drowsiness began to steal over me. The even pulsations of the engine soothed me, and in a few moments my hold on the papers loosened, and I slept profoundly. I wasawakened by the prolonged shriek of the engine as we raced down the incline to the entrance of the Severn Tunnel. I jumped up to close the window, and, as I reseated myself, looked casually at the other end of the carriage. What I saw there made me start and rub my eyes.

Sitting by the window, his shoulder turned towards me, was the dim figure of a man.

How on earth had he got there? Certainly I had the carriage to myself on leaving Newport. The train had not stopped since. Could he have lain concealed under the seat? Reflection contradicted this idea. On entering the compartment, I had clumsily dropped my umbrella, and had gone down on my knees to pick it up. I could take my oath that there was nobody beneath either seat at the time.

My mind flew to lunatics and escaped convicts. He might have come from some other carriage, and, crawling along the footboard, have opened the door of my compartment, and entered while I slept. Recollection flashed across me that the guard had locked the door before leaving the station. The whole thing was mysterious. All these thoughts had whizzed through my head with the rapidity of lightning.

All the time I kept my eyes earnestly fixed on the figure of my companion. It



"SITTING BY THE WINDOW WAS THE DIM FIGURE OF A MAN."

was not easy to distinguish much about him. The lamp, with which I had been so satisfied a short time before, was now burning unaccountably badly, and the whole carriage seemed full of fog.

As I strained my eyes, the quiet figure began to edge towards me. I say edge, but the word does not in the least describe the almost imperceptible movement. It was very slow, very gliding, and he scarcely seemed to diminish the distance between us.

My eyes must have grown accustomed to the curious light, for I was able to note the peculiarities of my unwelcome fellow passenger.

He was a small, thin man, dressed in a long cloak, evidently a waterproof. He wore no hat, and his hair was nondescript in colour. Harmless as he looked, I began to experience an indescribable feeling of alarm. I am not an imaginative man; indeed, I had always prided myself on my eminently practical way of looking at things. My foolish terror seemed an insult to myself. The man, whoever he was, lunatic or convict, was so much smaller than I, that supposing, improbable as it was, he *did* attack me, I had nothing whatever to fear. My superior size would tell in my favour.

And all this while, reason as I would, I could not arrest the shuddering horror that overcame me as I watched him. I longed to speak, to ask him why and how he came there, but my tongue refused to utter, and break the oppressive silence. With a sinuous movement he still approached me, keeping his head steadily turned away.

From under the flapping sleeves of the waterproof his arms projected, and the sight of his hands, long and white, with square tips to the fingers, and nails bitten below the quick, arrested my attention. They were the most repulsive imaginable. They were never still. I have noticed plenty of people afflicted with St. Vitus's dance, but that is the helpless twitch of disease, and totally different. These long fingers seemed to be crawling, creeping, smoothly and with a fixed purpose. My imagination certainly played me some odd tricks, but it seemed to me as if those horrible hands were animated with a separate intelligence of their own. They were like ravenous animals, restlessly awaiting their prey.

And all the time the man edged nearer. My self-control was leaving me, and I sat paralysed with fear. He had now reached the middle seat, and in a moment he would be touching me. With a desperate effort I seized the elbow rest which divided the seats one from the other, and pulled it down. That would stop him.

But no. He moved slowly on, and as his cloak brushed my barrier, without so much as his touching it with those dreadful hands, it flew back to its place in the cushions.

At that the little courage I had remaining, left me. I was unable to make any attempt to touch the communication cord, but sat huddled up in the corner, trying to squeeze myself farther away.

Nearer and nearer came the figure, nearer and nearer, and all the air around grew cold and damp.

Then, as he touched me, the head turned slowly, and I saw the face. A small white face, with pale eyes, and an expression in them which I dare not think of, lest I go mad.

Then swiftly the long hand shot out, and caught my throat, and beneath the clammy touch of those crawling fingers my flesh crept with repulsion. For it was not the touch of a living man.

The grasp of the hand tightened, the face came closer, scrutinising mine, the chill moisture enveloped me. I was suffocating.

Something awoke within me. By Heaven, that Evil Thing should not work its will unresisted! I struggled to thrust it from me. My strength was no more than a child's, and the hand at my throat remained as before. Only the head was thrown back, and the horrid features were convulsed with ghastly, silent laughter. As I realised the new horror of that soundless mirth, a shriek burst from my lips, and at the same moment the lamp flickered and went out.

Then my senses left me.

* * * *

Where was I? I asked myself, as I opened my eyes, and looked at the ceiling of the railway carriage and the extinguished lamp. The sun was shining brightly through the windows, giving quite a cheerful look to the dusty compartment. Sudden recollection flashed across me, and with a shuddering cry I sprang to my feet. There were no signs of my terrible travelling companion. Outside it was no longer country. We were flying through the suburbs of London. My faint had

lasted long. Could it have been a dream, some dreadful hallucination of the brain? As I stood wondering, my eyes fell on the cushion on which I had sat. In my fall to the floor it had been dislodged. What were those dark marks on the seat below? I turned the cushion, and saw the same marks repeated. Stains, of course, but caused by what?

As we approached Paddington I rose, and endeavoured to smooth my dress, and arrange my tie by aid of the glass under the parcel rack. My collar was torn. On my neck were five blue marks, finger marks I think.

Presently we steamed into the station, and I was forced to collect my wits sufficiently to take a hansom and drive to my rooms. For several days I was the victim of nervous prostration; then I wrote to my friend the managing-director of the railway, telling him the story, and begging him to come and see me. He complied at once, and made me repeat my adventure. As I finished I paused for the expressions of incredulity. None came.

"Are you sure you have the number of the carriage correct?" he asked.

I assured him that it was so.

"Your story," he said, gravely, "is most extraordinary, but I must tell you that there is a curious coincidence connected with it. Do you remember a murder that occurred in the train some months ago? No? Well, it happened in the Severn Tunnel. It was perpetrated by a small, pale man in a waterproof. I don't wonder you start. The victim was a wealthy old man, who had an unaccountable fancy for carrying his valuables loose in a bag. He was found murdered when the train reached Paddington. The small man had disappeared. After some weeks he was traced. He had jumped from the train, bag in hand, and was careless in the way he disposed of the stolen property. The murder took place in the identical carriage in which you travelled.

"But now comes the remarkable part of the story. The day on which you travelled, the murderer paid the penalty of his crime. He was hanged that morning."



THE FIGURE CAME NEARER AND NEARER, THEN THE LONG HAND SHOT OUT AND CAUGHT MY THROAT."

"Now," said my friend, after a pause, "are there any questions you wish to ask?"

"No, thank you," I said, slowly. I had heard enough for one day.



"'WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS INTRUSION? WHAT DO YOU WANT?' HE ASKED THE DETECTIVE."

THE BLACK STATUE.

THE STORY OF A DOCTOR'S GRUESOME DISCOVERY.

By Huan Mee.

Illustrated by Max Cowper.

"I ALWAYS sed no good could come of it," the woman cries with a choke, and then the little group edges back to the kerb, and gazes open-mouthed at the shuttered windows.

"And you ain't seen your Jim since last Monday, eh?"

"No, I ain't set eyes on 'im. It's just a week to-day. I sed as 'e left in the mornin', 'It would be better for you, Jim, if you slung up your job at Doctor Hazard's, 'cos no good can come of it; and he gives me the creeps every time I looks at 'im.'"

"Wot did Jim say?"

"He says, 'Beggars can't be choosers,' and the doctor paid 'im well."

"And you ain't seen 'im since?"

"No, I ain't, and I b'leve he's a bein' 'sperimented on."

"Well, why don't you tell the pleece?"

"I 'ave, and they're comin' round this mornin'."

The group comes forward again as a man, accompanied by a couple of constables, enters the square and pauses before the gloomy house.

"Clear this gaping lot away, Jackson," he says; and the crowd, by dint of physical persuasion, and repeated injunctions to "pass along," is hustled to the corner, where it awaits events. "Now, Smith, just knock a rat-tat."

Neither the first, second, nor third knock has the slightest effect, except to bring back the crowd, strongly reinforced, until it hangs around the railings.

"Force it," the man quietly remarks; and in a few minutes the door is open, and the excited idlers almost encroach on to the doorstep. "Jackson, clear this mob out of the square; Smith, follow me."

The door is pulled to behind the men; the crowd again retreats in disorder to the corner, and the constable walks to and fro in front of the house.

The two who have entered glance into the front room; it is empty, while the back room and the upper part of the house are the same.

"Try the basement, Smith."

They descend the stairs, and come to a sudden stop as they are met by an unexpected door.

"Sounds like iron," the chief exclaims, as he raps his knuckles against it.

"That's what it is," the constable agrees.

"Knock on it with that bar, and see if anyone's alive in the house or not."

As soon as the first blow has fallen the door is thrown open, and a man clad in his shirt and trousers confronts them; a man tall and dark, with his face clean shaven, his hair cut closely to his head, and his shirt-sleeves rolled tightly to his shoulders.

"Well, what is it, eh?" he asks. "Come in"; and as they enter he closes the door behind them.

The whole place seems weird and uncanny. The further end is draped by a long curtain, hanging from the ceiling to the floor; the walls are covered with shelves and cases, filled with glass vessels and polished instruments that vividly suggest their own uses, while in a corner alcove stands a life-sized statue, a Greek god, in black marble.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion? What do you want? Am I in London, or is this some part of the world where men's homes can be broken into, their scientific researches disturbed by strangers?"

"This house has been without a sign of life for a week, and your servant, who entered then, has never left it."

"You mean the man who used to do odd jobs for me. I discharged him ten days ago, and have not seen him since."

"He came here on Monday."

"He did not. I see you don't believe me—maybe you go so far as to think I have murdered him, eh? Of course, you've searched the house. This is my laboratory, and there's only the room through the curtains, there."

The officers step forward; the man draws back the curtains.

"Now, then, look! You see there's no one there, and if you're quite satisfied, I prefer to be left alone. You found your way in, so now you can find it out."

* * * *

For three years the gloomy house in the square has been vacant—not to let, but simply vacant, for Dr. Hazard is touring on the Continent. The missing servant has not been seen in London since the day he so suddenly and mysteriously disappeared, and the little gossiping group which once took such a morbid interest in his whereabouts has forgotten him in the excitement of other nine-day wonders, which have flourished and withered in their turn.

But now a change has suddenly come about; for the master is returning.

Brisk, business-like men measure floors and windows, energetic British workmen sit on planks and smoke, and all is ostentatious bustle and activity. At last the day comes when the final workman grudgingly and reluctantly takes his leave. Pantechnicons arrive and disgorge their contents, which shall transform the dismal dwelling into a habitation fit for a man and woman—for it is rumoured that Dr. Hazard is bringing home a wife.

That she is beautiful, the few loungers



THE DOCTOR BRINGS HOME HIS WIFE, AND THE LOUNGERS SEE THAT SHE IS BEAUTIFUL.

who are privileged to see the couple descend from the carriage cannot but admit; but still there is something chilling and repellent in that beauty. There is so much of the doctor's cold, insolent sneer reflected in her face, that it seems to them that like has chosen like.

Dr. Hazard assists his wife to alight, and she passes up the steps, and then turns and glances back in icy astonishment, as a young woman darts across the road, and lays a detaining arm upon her husband's sleeve.

"'Ave you found 'im, doctor?"

"Found whom?"

"My brother—Jim, you know—'im as used to work for you."

"No, no, my good woman. Go away. How should I have found him?"

The woman still retains her hold of his sleeve, as he tries to shake her off.

"You know where 'e is, Dr. Hazard," she cries, fiercely. "You know where 'e is."

"Tut, tut, my good woman. How should I know?"

"You do know, 'cos you knows as I knows 'e's in there," and she points to the house.

Without further parley, he thrusts her on one side and passes in.

His wife, moving from the window, turns towards him as he enters.

"Some of your friends seem to have good memories for you," she says.

"Yes. It's nonsense. Her brother disappeared three years ago, and she thinks I had something to do with it."

"And had you?"

"You're jesting."

"I never jest; I know life is nothing to you."

"On the contrary, life is a great deal to me. I have studied it; it interests me. I shall be able to show you some remarkable experiments, now we are home. I have everything to my hand in my laboratory—everything to aid me in my study of life and death."

"And I, to my horror, have found how little you think of either."

"You speak truly," the doctor answers. "I think nothing of either; but it is your home-coming. Forget these trifles, and let me show you the house."

"I wonder why I married you," she says, as she glares into his eyes.

"Out of gratitude for my service to your father."

"I wonder why I did not sooner kill myself."

"Tush! you talk like a child."

"The first time I saw you I shuddered, for you were as a blight in the very air; and then, slowly and viciously, you plotted in silence, until you had broken my heart and bought me from my father—until you held him bound hand and foot, and I was the price of your silence."

"You have said this so many times before," he mockingly interjects.

"And I say it for the last time now," she cried; "for in this house I see death written, and it is yours. A death worthy of such a devil."

"Loud applause from the gallery," the man cynically interjects; "now for the tour of inspection."

"My laboratory," Dr. Hazard exclaims, as they pause at length before the iron door, "or what you would perhaps call my torture chamber. Do you care to see it before science resumes her researches?"

She inclines her head, enters as he switches on the light, and gazes coldly round the room, aware that her husband's eye is upon her to catch a tremor of the lips that would show a spark of fear, and then with a gasp she falls back, and points with a trembling hand to the corner, where a curtain on a brass rod cuts off a portion of the room.

"Who is behind there?" she cries. "Who is behind there?"

He crosses the room, pulls back the curtain, and faces her.

"You are frightened at nothing," he chuckles. "A statue in black marble is sufficient to set you trembling; come nearer and examine it. Come and see with what marvellous accuracy every vein, every muscle and tendon is carved upon the stone."

"Who did it?"

"I, from life. You did not know I excelled in sculpture as well as other arts."

"It's a wonderful piece of work," she whispers, attracted in spite of herself, struggling to regain her composure, and not knowing why an icy fear still seems to grip her heart. "Very true to life."

"Very true indeed. Give me your hand."

He takes her hand, and places it upon the arm of the statue.

"There," he says, quietly, "you can almost fancy you feel the muscles beneath the skin, almost fancy that arm once moved. It is, as you say, very true to life."

With a cry of terror she drags her hand away, and, clutching the table for support, leans back against it, utterly unnerved, a nameless horror in her eyes.

"Is he—it—like the missing man?" she gasps at last.

Dr. Hazard purses his lips, and eyes the statue criticaily.

"Hum! it is strange," he answers, after a moment of silence. "But now you mention it, there is a likeness."

He offers her his arm.

"Don't come near me."

"As you please."

"Do you experiment with that in the room?"

"Certainly; for that is the result of my greatest experiment. You heard of the missing man they're still worrying me about?" He jerked his head meaningly towards the statue.

"It is not true; you are trying to drive me mad."

"Nonsense! It's true enough. That's the man, and I defy the world to find it out!"

His face flushes with a dull blaze of passion, and he catches her by the wrist and twists her round until her eyes look into his.

"And remember this, Beatrice: let there be no more of this childish folly and foolish threats, or as sure as you stand before me I'll kill you, and you shall be the companion statue on the opposite pedestal."

* * * *

"What do you think of the port, Hertz?"

"Splendid wine; '47, eh?" the man replies, holding his glass to the light.

"No, quite a modern vintage. Treated by my own process."

"What a wonderful chap you are, Hazard—always doing something to astound people; always inventing something."

"Pooh? You can't call an artificial maturing of wine an invention; but I have one or two inventions with which I mean to surprise the world. The illumination of this room is one of my secrets; those electric lights will burn for years without renewal or attention. Electricity as men understand it now is nothing. As I know it, it is a power that can control the world, that can prolong man's life beyond his wildest dreams, and then preserve his body unalterable for all time. The height of the ambition of the ancients was embalming.

"What progress! They embalmed their departed dead, that they might keep them even at their feasts. Death at their feasts," repeats Dr. Hazard, frowning under his eyebrows at his wife, who sits opposite to him at the table.

Throughout the dinner, the doctor's scorn of his wife has been so obvious that his guests gladly seize upon the new tenour of the conversation for relief.

"Then you have invented a process to arrest decay?" Dr. Hertz asks.

"Yes."

The doctor's wife rests



"THE DOCTOR PULLED BACK THE CURTAIN AND SHOWED A STATUE IN BLACK MARBLE."

her arms upon the table and leans towards her husband.

"You own you have invented a process to arrest decay in a body?" she says, coldly. "You own it, before your friends?"

"Certainly," he exclaims, carelessly flicking the ash from his cigar.

"It is wonderful!" Dr. Hertz remarks.

"Mrs. Hazard, your husband is a

remarkable man. You must be proud of him."

"Proud of him!" she exclaims, twisting her fingers in the tablecloth, and bending towards the visitor. "Proud of him! I hate him. I loathe him. He is right; he speaks truly; he has invented such a process—a process that permits him to slay men with impunity, and change them into black and shining marble. He is, as you say, a remarkable man."

The two guests gaze in astonishment at the woman who has risen from her seat, and with dilated eyes points at her husband, who sits back in his chair smoking his cigar.

"My dear Beatrice," he coldly exclaims at last, "you have another of your hysterical fits coming on. I am afraid I have erred in allowing you to hear so much of my discoveries. You are overwrought and excited. If you would rather retire, we will excuse you."

"I denounce you," she cries, "denounce you before your guests as a murderer—the murderer of the man who was in your employ three years ago. They searched London for him, and he was never found, and why? Because he never left this house; because he is here now. I dare you, I defy you, to take your friends, scientists like yourself, to your laboratory and show them the black statue—the body of the man you murdered, as you would murder me—if you dared."

The doctor frowns and looks perplexedly at his guests.

"I am sorry, my dear friends," he exclaims, rising and laying a hand on the shoulder of each. "It is very unfortunate, poor girl. You understand, of course. Would you mind humouring her? Will you come and see the statue that frightens her? It's a magnificent piece of work, a Grcek god I bought in Florence."

The doctor and his colleagues descend to the laboratory, and his wife follows.

With eyes that keenly appreciate, the two men glance around the room at the various appliances and delicate instruments that fill the cases lining the walls, at the strange-looking coils and other apparatus that even they cannot give names to.

"Here," cries the doctor, walking to the alcove screened by the curtain, "is the statue. Life-like I confess, startingly life-like; but that is all. Behold!"

With a flourish almost melodramatic, he flings back the curtain, and the lights gleam upon the polished figure—the Greek god with his arms folded upon his breast. The men stand rooted to the spot in admiration.

"Well, what do you think of my statue?"

"Your victim!"

"Hush, Beatrice. You alarm my friends."

"It is magnificent!"

"Yes," the doctor continues, "it is life itself. Look how the muscles stand out upon the arms, the veins in the hands and temples. Observe the folds of the girdle. Is it not superb?"

"Perfection!"

"And yet it is marble. Only marble, Beatrice," he continues, picking up a tiny pestle from the table. "Test it, Hertz."

"My dear Hazard——"

"To gratify her. Perhaps it will soothe her."

Dr. Hertz places his hand upon the smooth, cold surface of the statue, and then lightly taps it.

"It's a body," the woman cries. "Can't you see it is a body, or are you fools?"

"My dear Mrs. Hazard, no. You must forget all about that; it's only a beautiful piece of work in marble."

"You fool!"

"Beatrice, how dare you?"

"Now, my dear Hazard, don't excite her. It's very unfortunate."

"It's marble, Beatrice, don't you understand? Marble! marble! marble!" and the doctor strikes the figure with his fist as he shouts and glares at his wife. "I'm expecting a companion to it, Beatrice—a Venus. I've waited too long for it. I've been too lenient, but I will have it within a week."

There are hidden meanings, for his wife alone, in all that Dr. Hazard says during the remainder of the evening, and she answers back, scorn for scorn, hate for hate, and contempt for his contempt.

He has received the half-suggested, half-expressed commiserations of his friends with the quiet dignity suitable to the circumstances, and now he bolts the door and descends direct to the laboratory.

"It's a good thing for me that some scientists are fools, or I should have been in a bad way to-night," he mutters. "Curse the spitfire, she's too dangerous."

He passes into the inner room, there is a sound of basket work creaking as a big jar

is dragged across the room, and then a running and splashing as liquid pours into the bath. The furnace throws out a ruddy glow, and the doctor takes off his coat and vest, and works in a red light as the heat of the room increases.

Then wires are attached to one of the strange instruments at which his guests had marvelled, the opposite ends to plates of metal which are cast into the bath, and, lighting a cigar, he starts the battery and waits.

In a quarter of an hour he dips a rod into the liquid, and, withdrawing it, gazes with a sigh of satisfaction at the black, shining glaze with which it has become coated. Then, placing it on one side, he re-enters the outer room.

For a moment he stands listening at the door of the laboratory, and then stealthily moves up the stairs. The house is silent. Through the long oval fanlight over the hall door a struggling moonbeam throws a narrow ribbon of light upon the polished floor. Outside, a distant footstep approaches, passes, and fades away. The clock strikes two.

Slowly he ascends towards his wife's room. No doubt she is sleeping, and the task will be easier. And then, in the blackness of the staircase, he becomes conscious of another person, hears the faint suppressed breathing of someone hiding, lurking in the darkest corner and fearful of discovery.

He takes a phial from his pocket, and holding it well away from his face, pours the contents upon a handkerchief and listens again. Yes, there is someone. It is Beatrice. Perhaps creeping down to him as he is creeping up to her; coming by stealth to kill him as he works.

Suddenly he springs forward, and grips



"I DENOUNCE YOU BEFORE YOUR GUESTS AS A MURDERER!" SHE CRIED

her by the throat. There is an instant's struggle as he holds the handkerchief over her mouth—a moan, stifled in its birth, and she drops limply to the floor—dead.

Half carrying, half dragging the body, he descends to the laboratory. The light has gone out.

"Curse it," he mutters; "at this time, above all others—and I boasted it was infallible."

He passes into the inner room, where the crimson glow from the furnace gives just sufficient light to enable him to discern the outline of the bath, and then gradually and carefully he lowers his burden, until it

lies full length upon the bottom and the liquid rises almost to the edge.

He returns to the outer chamber, and by the flare of a spirit-lamp sets himself to remedy the defect in the light. As he works in the shadow, a woman glides round the half-open door, glances at him, then at the knife she carries; but, as he slightly shifts his position, passes swiftly across the room and conceals herself behind the curtain of the empty alcove.

The doctor holds the lamp above his head, and looks anxiously around. The curtains sway as though someone moved behind them, and he holds his breath and takes a step backwards; then the half-open door catches his eye, and with a sneer at his own nerves he pushes it to and turns again to his work.

A little longer, and the rooms blaze with light once more, and he walks into the inner chamber and gazes into the bath.

At the bottom there lies a figure seemingly cut from black polished marble. There is a long-drawn sigh behind him, and he turns with an involuntary cry of terror.

"Beatrice!"

He must be mad, haunted; he grips the side of the bath and stares down into it.

Yes, there lies the woman—not Beatrice, but the sister of the man standing behind that curtain—the two now turned to everlasting stone.

He knows that his wife is walking towards him, and yet he cannot move; his limbs seem paralysed. In a moment she will clutch him, and force him down beside his victim.

He must break the spell of horror that roots him to the spot, and with a supreme effort he takes a step towards her; but the gleam of frenzy in her eyes unnerves him. He blindly retreats, then stumbles against the bath, and, falling backwards, meets the doom he had prepared for her.



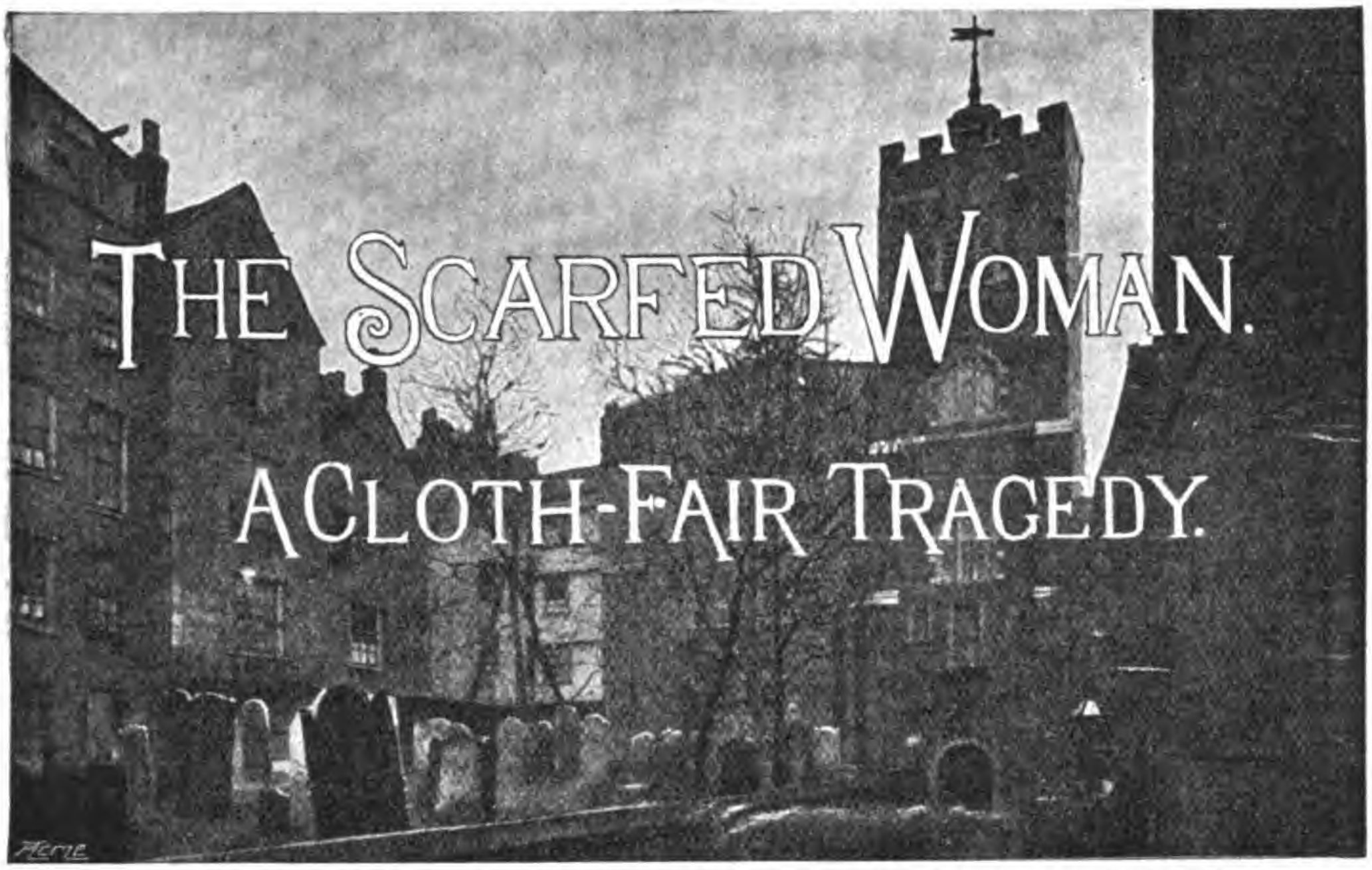
HE SUDDENLY SPRANG FORWARD AND GRIPPED HER BY THE THROAT, AND IN AN INSTANT SHE WAS DEAD.

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THE GRAVEYARD OF ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH—THE SCENE OF THE STORY.

By W. B. Northrop.

Illustrated by H. H. Flère and by Photographs.

IN the winter of 18— I acted as secretary to a distinguished London physician who had charge of one of the largest wards of St. Bartholomew's Hospital. In order to be near the scene of my occupations, I selected two rooms in a house situated in the very unprepossessing street known as Cloth Fair. This little street runs just north of the ancient church of St. Bartholomew the Great, and is very narrow and dingy.

A large window in my back room directly overlooked the graveyard belonging to St. Bartholomew's church, and I cannot say that the prospect of the multitudinous array of headstones, each leaning at a different angle, or that of the bare, leafless plane trees, locked, as if for support, in each other's branches, added greatly to the cheerfulness of the surroundings.

I had been in these quarters for about three weeks when I began to study very hard for an examination which I was most anxious to pass. As the final days for taking the "exam." drew near, I became much worried over the possible result. From anxiety and over-study, my intellect at times grew exhausted, and my memory became each day more and more unretentive. In consequence, I resorted to the taking of strychnia to keep me awake, and to brighten my faculties. I at last "passed," but the strain left me in such a depleted condition that my health seemed about to break down. After the dosing I had indulged in, of course, came the reaction, and I began to suffer from most dreadful insomnia.

Night after night I lay awake in my room, watching the boughs of the trees in the dreary necropolis outside wave back and forth against the darkened sky. At length, morphine in small quantities, and then in large doses, became my crying need.

One night, when I had taken a large quantity of the opiate and retired (the hour, I think, approached midnight), my attention was attracted by what sounded to me like a conversation carried on in low tones immediately beneath the window overlooking the cemetery. I arose, stepped softly to my window, and looked out. I could see no one. The voices seemed to emanate from people very close to the wall of the house. In order to see who the speakers were it would be necessary to raise the sash of the window, which was down; and this sash being very old and not supported by cords, I had to procure something with which to prize it up.

As I stepped back into the room with a view to procuring some implement with which to open the window, I glanced into the front room, the folding doors being open; and, as I did so, it seemed to me I saw a tall woman walk past the window overlooking Cloth Fair. A light from one of the street lamps brightened the apartment, and her form was perfectly distinct.



"AS I GLANCED INTO THE FRONT ROOM I SAW A TALL WOMAN WALK PAST THE WINDOW OVERLOOKING CLOTH FAIR."

As may be well imagined, I was greatly surprised at seeing someone in the next room, for I was positive of having locked my door. Besides, the lateness of the hour, and the fact that the intruder was a woman, and alone, made the presence of the stranger extraordinary. However, I am very near-sighted; and whenever I see anything, or imagine I see anything, about which there is an element of doubt, I make it a rule to immediately investigate, by a close scrutiny of the suspicious object, in order to satisfy my misgivings. Without hesitation, therefore, I advanced through the folding doors into the adjoining room.

Just as I stepped across the threshold, I plainly saw a woman, with a scarf of light material thrown over her head and shoulders, pass through the door leading out upon the landing. When I say she passed *through* the door, I mean literally through, for the door was locked and bolted.

I was shocked beyond measure. I managed to find a match, and with trembling hands succeeded in lighting my lamp. It is needless to say I kept the light burning brightly until daylight had well set in, employing myself in reading the while. As soon as I had breakfasted, I sent a telegram inviting one of my college chums to come down at once and spend a few nights with me. I had a haunting notion that I was about to be taken very ill, and I wished to have someone with me. I knew that he would come, as he had but a few days previously written me from Hull stating he intended coming to London, and asking if I could "put him up." He only awaited my message in order to start.

I did not desire the presence of this friend for the sake of mere companionship. I knew him to be a confirmed "spiritist," as he called it. He was for ever experimenting with slate-writing, crystal-gazing, or something of the kind, and I felt that if there were any significance in the apparition

which had honoured me with a visit, my friend would be the most likely person to sound the depth of the mystery.

When Banks arrived, I explained to him the nature of the experience through which I had passed. He looked, with scrutiny, at the pupils of my eyes, and then said: "Of course, you have been overtaxing your brain. Besides," he added, shaking his finger at me reprovingly, "you have been dosing yourself with morphine?"

I had to admit his accusation, and he immediately set about explaining to me that my "spook," as he was pleased to call it, was merely an hallucination, due partly to the overwrought condition of my nerves, but mainly to the influence of the drug.

Banks had come on Tuesday night. On the following Friday, shortly after midnight (my colleague had gone to the theatre, and, having probably stopped for supper somewhere, was late in coming home), I was sitting in the front room, when I again heard the low mutterings of voices under the window of the rear apartment. As I had, at an early hour of the evening, opened the window overlooking the graveyard—for the purpose of allowing the fumes of some nitrous oxide gas, with which I had been experimenting, to escape—the sash, on this occasion, was raised partly. So, as quietly as I could, I stepped into the back room, and peered out upon the graveyard.

It was a bright moonlight night, and objects could be plainly seen. I could distinctly hear the voices immediately beneath my window; but, look as closely as I would, I could see no one.

I called out, sharply, "Who's there?" The voices ceased instantly. At the same moment I felt a breath of cold air pass over my face, neck, and shoulders, as if an ice-chest had been opened in front of me.

The feeling sickened me somewhat, and I turned from the window back into the room. As I did so a fold of the drapery about the window fell against my arm. Looking suddenly to one side, as if drawn by some extraneous influence, I came face to face with a tall ethereal-looking woman, clad in some brocade material. Her head was covered with a thin scarf, one corner of which was torn away. Her eyes were closed as in sleep; or, rather—death!

She did not appear to notice me, but passed right through the curtain and the wall out into the graveyard. I had hardly recovered from my amazement, when I heard a heavy footstep downstairs. The next instant, the door of my front room quickly opened; and, in the over-excitement of intense expectation, I fell prone at the feet of—Banks!

He had come at so inopportune a moment that I anticipated seeing—I know not what.

"Hello! At it again!" he exclaimed. "Now, look here! This is all nonsense. If there are any spirits about here, why in thunder do they wait till I am gone ou——"

He had not finished the sentence before there broke upon our ears a low, stifled cry, coming from beneath the window; and, as Banks stopped to listen, I saw the woman with the torn scarf over her head appear again close to the drapery. She was more filmy in outline this time than she had been at first. I pointed to her. Banks looked, but could see nothing. He stepped to the window. As he did so, he passed, without knowing it, directly through the filmy form. I saw this, but stood as if



"I CALLED OUT, SHARPLY, 'WHO'S THERE?'"

paralysed—unable to speak or move a muscle.

Banks looked out of the window as I had done, but could see no one.

Stepping quickly into the next room, he procured a slate from my table, and, placing a pencil in my hand, bade me sit quietly without attempting to write anything. He also took from my mantelshelf a crystal half-sphere, and directed me to hold it steadily in my left hand, next to the slate.

"Look into the crystal and describe what you see," he said, stepping back, as if not to interfere with the operation of some power with which he seemed to think me possessed.



"I SAW IN THE CRYSTAL A GIRL, AND BEHIND HER CREPT A FIERCE GORILLA."

I was too dazed to do anything but his bidding, and immediately commenced to look intently into the crystal. As I gazed into its depths I distinctly saw the Scarfed Woman once more. She appeared to be this time in the country somewhere, for she was walking slowly, and as if expectantly, along the edge of a green field. I described the scene to Banks, speaking in a low voice.

"Can you draw it?" he asked, his tone denoting suppressed excitement.

"I shall try," I answered, attempting to make a tracing of the figure on the slate resting upon my knee, while I held the pencil in my right hand. Somehow my hand began to move across the slate, as if some strange power were impelling me to write.

"Observe carefully," said Banks, "and tell me all you see."

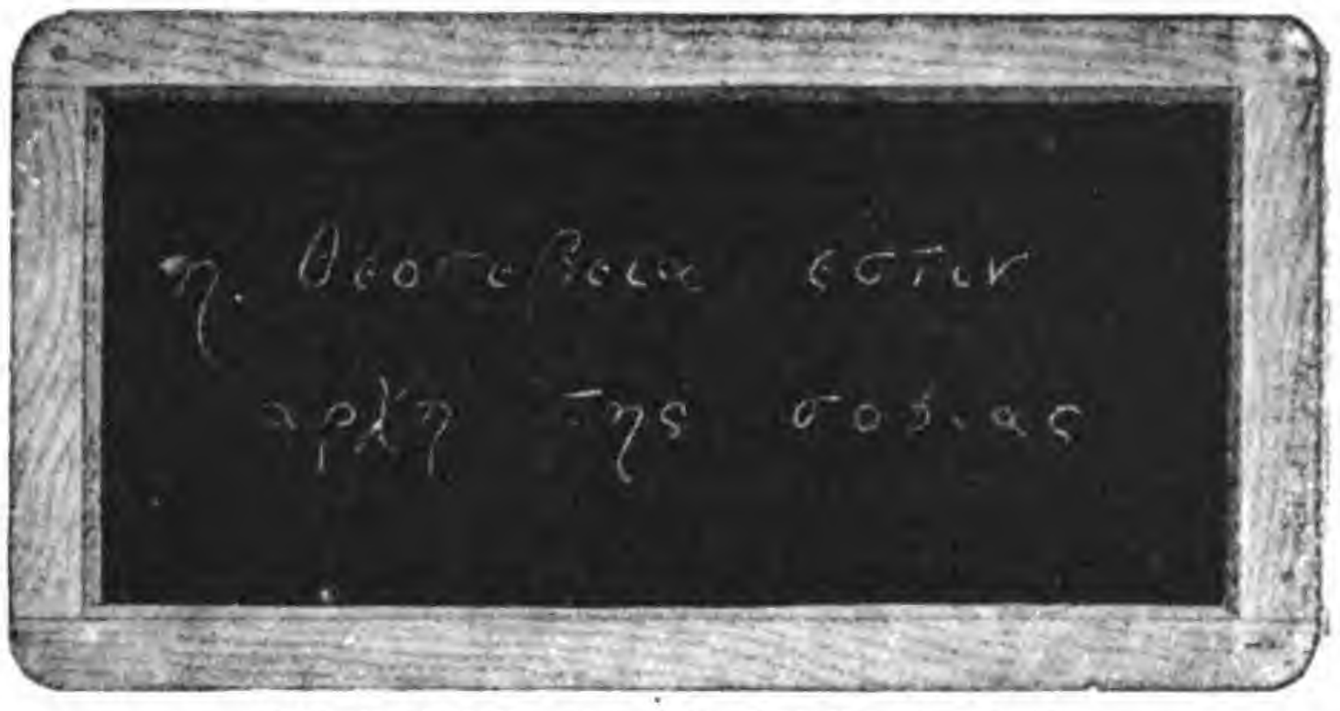
I gazed into the crystal: Presently I saw, creeping along the edge of a forest which skirted the green field in which the woman was walking, a huge gorilla. He carried a stout club in the right hand, and was watching the woman intently. I told Banks what I saw.

"Draw it, man; draw it," he said, excitedly, as if he were already acquainted with the series of events transpiring in the crystal.

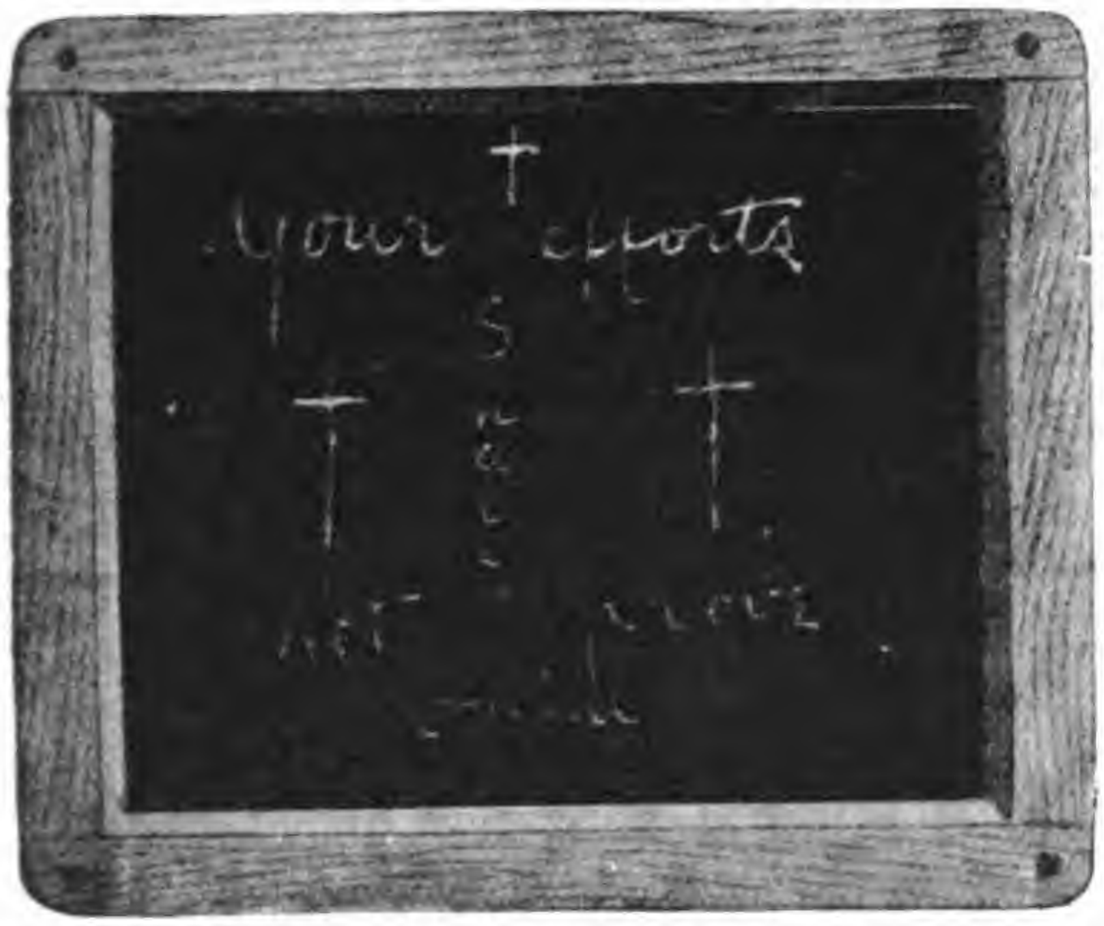
I continued looking into the half-sphere. Another figure came upon the scene. A tall, well-dressed man entered the lower edge of the crystal, so to speak. He seemed to be about a quarter of a mile away from the girl—at least, from the scale of the figures, I would say this was about his distance from her. She was walking toward him, but a cluster of trees intervened between them, and she evidently could not see him. Behind her crept the fierce gorilla, with a hideous grin upon his countenance. He seemed to be watching for an opportunity to spring upon her from the woods, his dark form slipping in and out among the trees like that of some gruesome ghoul. Just as the man entered the woods which separated him from the girl, the animal sprang upon her, and, seizing her by the hair, felled her with the club, administering several quick blows about the face and temple. I nearly swooned when I beheld this, for I could not help but feel that the crystal scenes were actually occurring before my eyes, and I was utterly unable to render aid.

As I looked, the gorilla dropped the club beside the woman, and, wrenching from her head a handful of hair and a portion of the scarf, he made off into the woods.

In a few moments the man emerged from the cluster of trees. I plainly saw the look of horror upon his face as he suddenly beheld the murdered woman. He seized the club, and looked about in a frenzied way. He then fell



THE WRITING ON THE SLATE IN GREEK.



"I HAD WRITTEN, 'YOUR EFFORTS SHALL NOT PROVE VAIN.'"

upon his knees beside the woman, and, covering his face with his hands, began to sway his body back and forth in a distracted, grief-stricken manner.

While he knelt in this posture, several men came suddenly from the woods near by, and seized him. At this point, a white smokiness obscured the scene in the crystal, and I could make out no more of the tragic pantomime.

Banks appeared to be in the greatest excitement. "I knew Frank was innocent —I knew it all along," he said, laughing loudly, almost hysterically. "I must return to B—— to-morrow."

To my great surprise, he stated that his most intimate friend had been tried and convicted of the murder of his betrothed, and sentence of death had been passed upon him at B——. The atrocious murder had been bruited throughout the land. I had, of course, read of it some time previously, but I did not know that Banks was in any way associated with the murderer, or the supposed murderer. No one had thought the man innocent for a moment, as he had been caught "red-handed," and all the circumstantial evidence pointed to his guilt. The absence of motive had been pleaded by the defence, but a recent quarrel between the man and the woman was proved; and, though it was only a "lovers' disagreement," of course it was magnified by the crime. I shall not here rehearse the details of this evidence, as my narrative has more to do with my own experiences than with the facts in the case.

"The drawing you have made will be of the greatest assistance," said Banks, as he took the slate from my hands.



"AS I LOOKED IN THE CRYSTAL THE FACE OF THE SCARFED WOMAN APPEARED. SHE WAS BEHIND ME."

To our disappointment and chagrin, we found no drawing at all, but merely a few words written in Greek. Banks fairly raved, saying there was some fiendish power interfering with the saving of the life of an innocent man. He insisted upon my again gazing into the crystal; but the vision did not at this time repeat itself, and my hand on this occasion wrote nothing.

Being very deficient in the knowledge of Greek, it was a matter of great surprise to me that I should have written in this language. Banks explained this by saying that I had nothing whatever to do with what I wrote when "under the influence of the power"; that I would have written Sanscrit, had the spirit moved me so to do.

We sat up far into the night discussing the affair. In thinking the matter over, we could not understand how a gorilla of such size could prowl about an English village without being noticed. It occurred to Banks that, perhaps, the events I beheld in the crystal had taken place in some foreign land where gorillas are found. He thereupon decided upon trying another experiment in reference to the apparition of the Scarfed Woman.

Placing my camera in a certain position, he requested me to sit beside the window overlooking the churchyard, and be prepared to write anything I should feel myself influenced in writing, or drawing—insisting that I give myself up entirely to the power which might move my hand. At the same time, he provided me with the crystal. He then desired that I should supply him with a portion of magnesium powder.

His preparations complete, he extinguished the light.

"How am I to see crystal-pictures in the dark?" I inquired.

"It will not be dark all the time," he said, significantly; and this mysterious statement was all I could extract from him.

For an hour we sat in silence, and then, suddenly, the low murmurings I have already described began under the window. Sitting there in the dark, I felt that the Scarfed Woman must be about the room somewhere, as her presence was always announced by the sound of the voices outside.

I peered into the crystal, which, though dark, was still visible. I could make out a portion of the reflection of trees outside, and some of the drapery about the window. I saw the high back of the chair in which I was sitting, and the edge of a majolica vase near by.

As I looked at the reflection of the back of the chair, the face of the Scarfed Woman suddenly appeared in the crystal. She was standing immediately behind me, looking over the top of the chair. At the same moment, I felt the chilly air on my face and neck. I began to shake violently, and felt that some strange power had begun to exert its influence upon me. I tried to call out to Banks, but my voice failed, and my tongue refused to articulate.

Suddenly, there was a blinding flash, as of lightning. I dropped the slate and the crystal, the latter rolling with a dull reverberation across the floor, and sounding like the peal of thunder which follows the lightning's flash. I cried out in alarm.

Banks laughed. The flash was only that of the magnesium light.

When we picked up the slate, we found upon it this strange message—

"Your efforts shall not prove vain."

The next morning, before Banks left for B—— he was engaged in developing and printing the negative of a picture. He showed it to me, and, though the statement is hardly a credible one, the photograph given on the previous page, which he took by flash-light in my room, turned out to be a photograph, to the very life, of the murdered girl!

The day subsequent to Banks' departure, I received a message asking me to come to B—— at once. He had obtained a stay of proceedings through some technicality, and the life of his friend was spared some short time.

On investigation, he had ascertained that, some months previously, corresponding to the time at which the murder of the woman occurred, a gorilla had escaped from a travelling show; which, being in financial difficulties, had not been able to remain at B—— long enough to effect the capture of the beast. Banks received from the manager of the show the following letter:

"Dear Sir,

"The animal of which you speak was very docile when with me, and I do not think him capable of any harm. The only trouble I ever had with him was once when, being enraged, he seized a club and struck a woman on the head. Nothing serious came of the affair, however. If you have captured the gorilla, I shall pay you a suitable reward if you will keep him until my agent arrives.

"(Signed) EDWARD BARRINGER, Mgr."

This was sufficient. In a few days we had hundreds of men scouring the country. We were about to give up the search, when one of the party came upon the dead body of the gorilla behind an old mill. The side of the face was mutilated. He had evidently hidden in the deserted mill, the machinery of which had begun to work during a flooding of the river, and had crushed him. He had managed to drag himself outside to die. The most important fact was that, in the animal's right hand, and wrapped about his wrist, was found a quantity of hair. It corresponded to that upon the head of the murdered girl. There were also bloodstains upon the hands and arms. These, examined chemically and microscopically, gave all the tests for human blood.

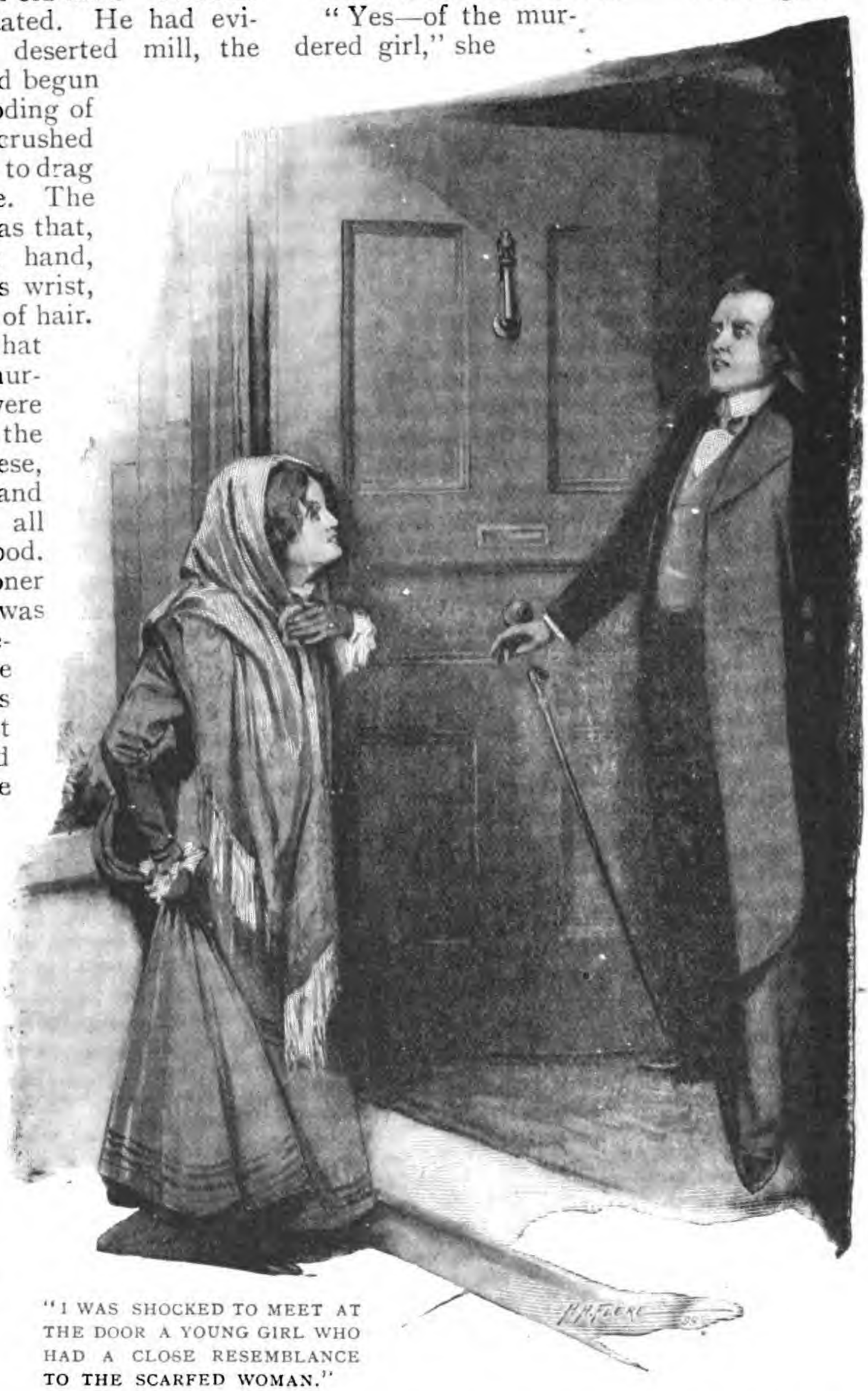
The sentenced prisoner was pardoned. But it was too late. He died before he could leave prison, first losing his intellect. The great strain of the trial, and the knowledge that he was innocent of the crime, had preyed upon his mind after the sentence of death had been passed. This was another instance of the danger of convicting by circumstantial evidence alone.

After this signal triumph of "spiritism," I once more returned to the Cloth Fair house, Banks accompanying me. We did not see the Scarfed Woman again; but, about a month after the events I have narrated, one morning, as I was coming from my rooms, I was met at the door by a young woman whose close resemblance to the apparition gave me one of the greatest shocks I have ever received. Over her head was thrown a scarf, which added greatly to the resemblance. She asked if Mr. Banks were in. I called him.

When he saw the girl, he almost fainted. "You are the sister of the——" he began.

"Yes—of the murdered girl," she interrupted. "She appeared to me recently," continued the girl. "We stopped here in this house last year just before her death, and——"

"What!" exclaimed Banks, looking at her in amazement, "she lodged here?"



"I WAS SHOCKED TO MEET AT THE DOOR A YOUNG GIRL WHO HAD A CLOSE RESEMBLANCE TO THE SCARFED WOMAN."

"Yes," replied the girl, "and even then she felt that something terrible was going to happen to her. For, two nights before she left for the country, she told me she heard low mutterings under the window in the back room. Looking out, she saw a young woman, dressed exactly like herself, walking in the graveyard. It worried her very much. We moved away in a day or two. Last night she appeared to me and said she was happy, because Charlie was with her."

("Charlie" was the man betrothed to the girl, and who had died in prison.)

"Did she say anything else?" inquired Banks.

"Yes," replied the girl, breaking down and beginning to weep. "She said I would die in this house in a few days."

At these words the girl grew faint, and we brought her into the house, and carried her into the back room, placing her upon a couch. I stepped into the front room to get some restoratives, while Banks dashed water in her face. To our utter consternation, however, and despite all our efforts to revive her, in a few minutes she died, thus verifying the ominous prediction of the apparition.

A few days after this I was taken very ill. The strain of the remarkable events through which I had passed unbalanced my reason, and for some time I was down with "nervous prostration." On my recovery I had to renounce the medical profession, as the doctors said that any difficult study would be fatal. I gave up the Cloth Fair apartments and moved to more cheerful surroundings.

Not long ago, I was not a little surprised to learn that the house in which these strange events transpired belonged originally to the grandparent of the two girls whose tragic deaths I have described. I also learned that an old manuscript had been found in the house, which to a nicety foretold the exact manner of their deaths. This manuscript I have never seen; but I cannot say I altogether doubt its existence; for, after what occurred to me in connection with this affair, I cannot but assert my belief in agencies supernatural.

"MOTHER BIDS ME BIND MY"—HARMSWORTH.

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THE MYSTERY OF THE BRONZE STATUE.

By W. S. Sutton.

Illustrated by Max Cowper.

PREFATORY NOTE.

The murder of Sir John Duckford and Mr. Jacob Hilton, an Englishman, who had for many years resided on the Continent, is still a vivid memory.

At whose hands, however, they came by their death remains a mystery, for the perpetrators of the foul deed—though popular surmise pointed to the miscreants, who were credited with having stolen a valuable bronze from the museum—were never traced.

The following MS., now for the first time made public, which was found, crumpled and torn, near the body of Mr. Hilton, throws a singularly uncanny and almost incredible light upon the gruesome affair. If it be, as is probable, a source of ridicule to the prejudiced and ignorant, the open-minded, I trust, will find therein matter for serious reflection.

These latter I would refer to the collection of spirit lore and story formed by Mr. Andrew Lang, and regarded by that level-headed littérateur with sober tolerance; as well as to the more technical works of Mr. Podmore, and other scientists, who have succeeded in elucidating much that has hitherto been without Nature's pale by an ingenious application of Nature's laws.

I.

THOUGH the tragedy of Alan Chartier's death filled me with horror, I must, to my shame, confess to experiencing a certain elation. For a rival, such as any man might fear, had been removed, and Alice Denzil, no longer under the spell of his subtle charm, was free to recognise my more sober devotion.



WE RAISED THE PROFESSOR'S BODY AND BORE IT TO A COUCH

With Chartier my intercourse had been slight, and the rare occasions of our meeting had but engendered the mutual distrust that precludes desire for closer acquaintance. Great, therefore, was my surprise on being notified by his executors that he had bequeathed to me his bronze statue of Maximin, a veritable antique, and the gem of a collection that justly enjoyed a world-wide reputation.

As, however, a strenuous life of stern realism had stifled what little appreciation for the arts a more leisured existence might have fostered, this posthumous courtesy awoke in me little emotion, save a nebulous regret at having misjudged my dead rival. Still, I accorded to my new possession a prominent position in my sanctum, where, amid its *fin-de-siècle* environment of luxurious ease, it looked so grotesquely incongruous as to evoke the cynical deprecation of my old friend Professor Style.

This erudite virtuoso was never tired of expatiating upon what he declared was a unique example of Roman art; for, though but at earliest the work of the third century, the bronze would not have discredited the zenith of the Augustan period. The statue, which was in height some five feet, portrayed the Scythian in his shepherd's garb, before his advancement to within measurable distance of the purple he so ignobly wore. This bald statement must suffice. For ample detail I refer the curious to that excellent monograph, by Professor Style, that he

had scarce completed ere a ruthless fate snatched him from our midst. It is of this that I must now speak.

One evening, Style, after his wont, dropped in. I was on the point of going out, and, guessing the motive of my friend's visit, did not scruple to keep my appointment. I bade him till my return take possession of my study, where he would find cigars, spirits—and the Maximin. He nodded a laughing assent, and we parted.

I spent two delightful hours with Alice, now growing perceptibly reconciled to the loss of one who, if a tithe of the rumours that darkened his memory were true, would indeed have made an ineligible husband. She, I think, recognised this, and, out of gratitude for her escape, and contrition for such slights as I might hitherto have suffered at her hands, began to regard my suit with no equivocal favour.

I left her house as the neighbouring church of St. Barnabas was chiming eleven. Home was soon reached, and, letting myself in, I hastened to my study, expecting to discover Style wrapped in smoke and contemplation. To my surprise the room appeared empty; but I noticed that the Maximin had been removed from its customary position, and was standing on the rug, before the fire; placed there, maybe, by its admirer, that he might the better consider its artistic points. I summoned my valet, and questioned him as to the Professor's departure. Of this the man knew naught, nor could he, in answer to further query, account for the statue's displacement, a feat assuredly beyond my friend's unaided strength. Of a sudden his face paled.

"Look, sir!—look!" he cried, starting back.

My eyes followed the direction of his gaze. From below a Persian cloth, whose embroidered splendour nearly touched the floor, protruded a clenched hand, which from the cameo ring encircling its third finger I knew to be Style's. We moved the table, and reverently raising the body, bore it to a couch. Though the warmth had not wholly left his limbs the poor fellow was quite dead. His features were hideously distorted, and the impress of pain and terror with which they were stamped attested but too significantly the torture he must have undergone.

In my present awful pass I have no heart to speak further of this grim horror. Let such as love gruesome detail look up the ample reports of the coroner's inquest as given by contemporary journalism. Sufficient here to say that Professor Style was strangled, and that the brutal deed was accomplished with a ferocity and strength so preternatural as to baffle the ingenuity of our shrewdest detectives. The manner of his death—which, by the way, bore a strange resemblance to that of Chartier—was not inaptly compared at the time to the tragedy so graphically related by Poe in "The Murder in the Rue Morgue"; but the grisly and bizarre element was, I think, even more pronounced in the real than in the fictitious drama.

As soon as I was in a position to leave town I dismissed my servants, and, having placed my house in charge of a caretaker, a decayed gentlewoman of unimpeachable reference and strong nerve, I hurried abroad, trusting in the excitement and hurry of travel to lay the ghastly memory of the past month. But scarce a fortnight had elapsed ere a telegram demanding my instant return reached me at Vienna. I hastened home, to find, on reaching London, that the poor woman to whom I had entrusted my ill-omened abode was dead—done to death in the same awful manner as Professor Style!

The police were again completely at fault. No inkling of the truth dawned upon them. In the light of subsequent events that would have been more astounding than the truth itself. Even now, the accuracy of this statement—made though it be by an eye-witness—can be alone attested by death. Were I to survive this night these words would, to the world, seem but the fantasy of a madman's brain.

Once more I quitted England, leaving this time my house unoccupied, assured in the knowledge that its evil repute would be a sure deterrent to thief and burglar. For three months I roamed through Hungary and the Tyrol, and when in late autumn I turned homeward I was a happy and hopeful man, for Alice Denzil, whom, with her mother, I had met at Pesth, had promised to be my wife, and our marriage was fixed for the following spring.

For a bride to cross such an inauspicious threshold as mine were impossible; so I cast about for a new abode, which I found at length at Surbiton—a well-ordered, spacious, and newly built villa. Thither, when vacated by the decorators, I moved my furniture; and cheerful and homely the place looked when, the following June, on

our return from our wedding tour, I welcomed Alice as its mistress.

And now I reach the nadir of my misery, to which, though even now its memory lacerates my heart and racks my brain with the bitter strength of present despair, I must perforce make brief reference. Thus only can the tragedy of the past, and the gruesome catastrophe of the immediate future, be comprehended in all their grotesque terror.

A week after our home-coming, Alice and myself were, with our old friends the Baxters, seated in the drawing-room. It was late, and Mrs. Baxter remarked that if they were to catch the last train they must say good-night.

"But the train doesn't start for forty minutes," I said, in deprecation of premature departure.

Tom Baxter glanced at his watch. "Twenty minutes," he said, authoritatively.

"Forty minutes," I persisted; "let the time-table decide."

I rose to fetch it, when Alice, who was nearer the door, said, "I'll get it, dear. I can lay my hand upon it at once; I was consulting it only this morning." She left the room, and we heard her open and shut the library door. Then of a sudden there rang out a shriek so piercing, so appalling, as for the moment to strike us motionless. The voices of the terrified servants rose from below, and their hurried steps sounded on the stairs as we sprang to our feet. I was the first to reach the library door. It was immovable—locked.

"Alice! Alice!" I cried. No answer.

I stepped back some two paces, and flung my weight against the panels. The lock gave; I was precipitated forward. The room was in utter darkness.

"Light!" I gasped; "for heaven's sake, light!"

Someone lit the gas.

At the base of the pedestal whereon stood the bronze lay my wife. I threw myself at her side, and called her endearingly by name. She returned no answer. Sick with apprehension, I peered into her face. It was black and distorted, with suffused eyes that, starting from their sockets, stared into mine with a stony glare of pitiful entreaty.

"Dead!" I moaned. "Merciful heaven! dead!" And I fell senseless across her corpse.

II.

When at length I rose from my bed, on which a fever of uncertain issue had stretched me helpless, I vowed my returning strength to the prosecution of a ven-



AT THE BASE OF THE PEDESTAL WHEREON STOOD THE BRONZE LAY MY WIFE.

geance that was to me as the very breath of life.

Intuitively I connected my wife's death, as well as the preceding atrocities, with my legacy, the bronze Maximin. This I knew to be of great value, and as such likely to tempt covetous rascality. I reasoned then that by an extraordinary series of coincidences the would-be thief had on each occasion been baffled in his nefarious intent by the inopportune presence or entrance of those whom he had sacrificed to the fury of balked greed, or the exigency of safety. That the assassin was not of the common ruck was evident; yet, so far from lessening my determination, this unknown danger urged me forward.

After a somewhat cursory investigation,

the police had, with the smug perfunctoriness that distinguished them when dealing with the former crimes, relegated my wife's murder to the category of unsolved mysteries. I saw then that I must virtually act alone.

My first care was to seek a helpmate, and after some difficulty I procured the services of one John Evan, an ex-sergeant of the Guards, and a giant whose stature and strength would have warranted him in contesting a fall with Goliath himself. Well armed, we each in turn kept watch over the statue, agreeing that the explosion of a pistol should apprise the other, were any sudden danger to arise.

On the fifth night of our vigil I retired at midnight, utterly worn out, to my bedroom, in the hope of snatching some few hours of much-needed sleep. I left Evan on guard, seated in an armchair in front of the Maximin, smoking his pipe and reading the day's paper. On gaining my room I threw myself, dressed as I was, upon the bed.

From a troubled sleep I woke, my limbs a-tremble, and my brow clammy with a cold sweat. It seemed as though someone from a vast distance had spoken my name. A limitless space yawned around me as I sat up and listened—listened till the whispers that dwell in the silence of the night crept into my ears and filled my brain with a hideous dread. The tension was becoming insupportable, when of a sudden, clear and sharp, rang out the warning.

I tore down the stairs and into the library. As I entered, the body of the sergeant was hurled across the room. It struck the edge of the table with fearful force, and rolled, an inert mass, to the floor. Dazed and panic-stricken, I fired my revolver at a venture. A howl of pain, raucous as that of a savage beast, rent the air, and I reeled backward stunned and bleeding. The front door fell to with a deafening clang.

Regaining my feet, I staggered from the house. The calm of the night was broken by the thud of a retreating footfall. Stepping into the road, I looked down the hushed avenue. Past the sleeping villas, bounding from shadow into light, from light into shadow, as one by one the lamps were left behind, sped a monstrous form. It ran with incredible fleetness, and was lost to view in the distant gloom.

A policeman came up. I could not speak. I pointed to certain crimson spots that bespattered the ground—my chance shot had told—then down the avenue. Very faint the footfalls now—almost inaudible. I beckoned the man to follow. Slowly, painfully, I dragged my aching limbs to the library. On the floor lay the dead body of John Evan. The statue of the Maximin was gone!

Now at last I held the clue; yet so *outré*, so opposed was it to sense and possibility, that to have sought official aid would have been to invite ridicule, or at best such commiseration as is accorded the insane. More than ever, then, had I now to rely upon my own unaided efforts, and, while the hue and cry of Scotland Yard frittered away to its usual lame conclusion, perpend my course.

Broadcast and persistent advertisement, though baited with promise of ample reward, proved sterile. None could tender information as to the lost statue—worthless conjecture only, and unsolicited advice. At last my patience became exhausted, and, leaving for ever my home of hateful memory, I set forth on my quest.

For years I was a wanderer, drawn hither by recital of uncanny crime, driven thither by report of antiquarian find—superior to hardship and danger, guided through the shoals and quicksands of despair and doubt by the dim beacon of revenge. And now that the hour has come, I sit impotent—thwarted by a purblind fool. Yet no small solace have I in the knowledge that, as I pen these words, the shadow of his doom is creeping o'er him.

A week ago I reached this old-world place, where, at the inn, I made the acquaintance of Sir John Duckford, the celebrated dilettante and collector, whose artistic knowledge is almost encyclopædic. As I had some hope of turning this to account, I sought his company; but though he had seen and admired the Maximin—it appeared that he had had intercourse with Chartier—and, like the rest of the world, had heard of its disappearance, he could hazard no surmise as to its whereabouts. His sympathy, however, at my loss was so unaffected that my heart went out to him.

We spent our days together, making excursions into the delightful country that surrounds this forgotten town, or visiting the rich architectural beauties of its silent streets. Close fellowship begat mutual confidence. He consulted me relative to certain family matters, while I in turn related my strange experience. He listened in

courteous silence, punctuated with compassionate interjection at my misfortune; but when, in an access of thoughtless candour, I expounded my theory, he with adroit tact deflected the drift of our converse. He clearly thought the trouble had affected my brain.

This morning a letter of recall came for Sir John. As, however, he had not visited the museum, he postponed his departure for a day. The forenoon was devoted to packing; and, our mid-day meal discussed, we strolled leisurely to the building that contains the town's artistic treasures. Formerly the palace of some noble, it boasts now but scant patronage, for the townsfolk love not art, and tourists are few. The custodian gave us admittance, readily pocketed a gratuity, and left us to our own devices.

The collection occupies the left wing. It is heterogeneous and neglected; yet to my companion it afforded no small pleasure. He descanted learnedly, and—to my thinking — with excessive prolixity, on such curios as took his fancy. At last, somewhat tired, we sat down, and, overcome maybe by the oppressive atmosphere of the unventilated rooms, lapsed unconsciously into a doze.



I POINTED TO CERTAIN CRIMSON SPOTS THAT BESPATTERED THE GROUND.

I must have slept for some hours, for it was dusk when I awoke. I aroused Sir John, and, half amused, half vexed, at this untoward occurrence, we rose to depart. To our surprise we found the door by which we had entered locked and unyielding. We raised our voices to their highest pitch: a dismal echo was the sole response. We ran to the nearest window: it gave upon a high-walled courtyard. Cursing the custodian's thoughtlessness and neglect, we proceeded to make a careful survey of the museum, in the hope of finding another exit.

In the farthest gallery we came upon a door that yielded to the touch. We entered a large chamber — the chamber wherein I now write—which serves apparently as a lumber and store room, containing as it does a quantity of furniture, worm-eaten and decayed — doubtless a remnant of the palace's ancient glory—besides a most varied collection of articles which civic indifference has consigned to uncatalogued obscurity. Sir John, who was in advance, stopped suddenly.

"Look!" he cried. "There! The Maximin!"

Before me, half concealed by a couch whose erstwhile beauty damp and time had sadly marred, stood the lost statue—the bronze Maximin. My excitement was such that, had not Sir John held me, I should have fallen.

"Steady, old man," he said. "I can quite understand your feelings. Better now?"

With an effort I regained my composure and nodded. I could not trust myself to speak. Then I looked eagerly around. A weapon lay at my hand — a heavy mace, derelict of chivalry, that of a surety had never been wielded in holier cause than mine. With a shout of delirious joy I snatched it up, and sprang forward. Sir John interposed his stalwart person.

"Out of the way!" I cried, attempting to thrust him aside. He closed with me, and strove to wrest the weapon from my grasp.

"Man—man!" he cried, between the throes of our desperate struggle, "what

madness would you do? Has luck turned your brain?"

"Let go! Let go!" I shrieked, "that, ere it work further ill, I may dash yonder accursed devil to atoms. Let go, fool, ere I do you a mischief."

"Never, madman!"

The strife drew to its close. My antagonist, a heavier and more powerful man than myself, was surely gaining the upper hand. My grip on the steel shaft was relaxing. I made one supreme effort, frenzied and vain, then loosed my hold.

"Your blood be on your head," I cried, and slipped my hand into my pocket. I had left my revolver at the inn!

Sir John laughed, and sat down on the couch, behind which stood the statue. He regarded me fixedly as he poised the mace in his hands. Anon he lit a cigar, and began to smoke. His eyes never left me. He seemed to apprehend a renewed attempt on my part to destroy the Maximin. Yet he need have had no fear, for my bitter hate had turned from that which had wrecked my life to him who had balked my vengeance. As, baffled and sick at heart, I sank into a chair, I would not for my very soul's salvation have stayed the dread fate that awaits him—that awaits me.



"'OUT OF THE WAY!' I CRIED, ATTEMPTING TO THRUST HIM ASIDE."

The moon had risen, and was now flooding the room with its silver light. The statue stood out black and grim. Its shadow fell athwart the doomed man. The bells in the old tower chimed ten. From afar came a faint burst of song and laughter. It fell upon my ears like a dirge—like some mocking memory of the old life.

Then over me came a longing for someone to whom I could speak my dying words—could make my last confession. There was Sir John, but he was my enemy, and could never bear testimony to my truth. Like me, he would not see dawn. Naught remained, then, but to write down my weird experience. Perchance on the morrow it would be found. I took out my note-book and began to write.

For over an hour I kept without pause to my task; I knew that my time was short. A large bat fluttered across the room, and struck the quarries of an old window, that rattled with the impact. Distracted momentarily by the noise, I looked up. My eyes fell upon the Maximin, and I shuddered. The statue had become gigantic; it towered above Sir John in malign menace. I felt for the man such a pity as the inquisitor might feel for the victim who should grace the *auto da fé*. A morbid compunction stirred my conscience. I could not keep silence.

"Do you remember," I asked, in a quaking voice, "what Gibbon in his 'Decline and Fall' says about Maximin—about his fury, his cruelty, his strength?"

Sir John shrugged his shoulders.

"A relevant remark!" he exclaimed, selecting another cigar from his case.

"Very relevant," I said. "You'll find it so."

I laughed nervously; for I saw that the colour of the bronze was rapidly changing—changing to a fleshly hue.

Sir John deigned no reply. He struck a match and lit his cigar. His apathy shocked me. Much as I hated the man, I would not have him go to his death unprepared.

"Do you ever pray?" I whispered, hoarsely.

"What?" he exclaimed. Then, "Have a cigar? I find it infallible for unstrung nerves."

"For heaven's sake," I implored, "say some kind of prayer."

"You won't smoke? You make a great mistake."

He leant back in the full enjoyment of his Havana.

Thus far have I written of the immediate past. I must now, as best I may, keep pace with the fearful tragedy that is evolving itself before my eyes. Thus only can this document be complete—be conclusive.

I raise my eyes; hardly can I repress the cry that starts to my lips. The statue lives! On its mighty limbs the great muscles twitch and quiver. From the depths of its evil eyes its foul spirit glowers. The bat, flapping round in uncertain orbit, strikes it, and utters a shrill cry.



"THE STATUE LIVES! ON ITS MIGHTY LIMBS THE GREAT MUSCLES TWITCH AND QUIVER."

"What's that?" exclaims Sir John. "What are you grinning at, man?"

I am utterly unnerved. I try to say, "For heaven's sake, say some prayer"; I only mow and gibber.

The horror raises its giant arm. My voice finds vent in an unearthly yell. Sir John, starting to his feet, looks round.

"My God!" he shrieks. "Mercy! mer——"

It is too ghastly; I can look no more.

"God have mercy upon me a sinner. Have mercy up——"

PHOTOGRAPHERS—*Amateur and Professional—should remember that immediate and careful consideration is given to all photographs sent to the Editor of the HARMSWORTH MAGAZINE, Harmsworth Buildings, London, E.C. Photographs should be striking and definite. Photographs of telling pictures are invited. All parcels must have stamps sent for their possible return.*



THE FIFTH MILE-POST

AN INDIAN GHOST STORY.

By C. E. Jeffery.

Illustrated by Ernest Prater.

ONE evening, after a hard day's work, Staples, the young District Superintendent of Police of Chota Jahannampur, was sitting before the door of his tent, enjoying his pipe and the cool air blowing across the water; for his Penang lounging chair had been placed on the bank of the *khal* or creek.

His lengthy limbs were outstretched, his peg glass stood at his elbow, and his grimy fox terrier, Cinders (so called because she used to spend most of her time in the stoke-hole of the steam launch), was sitting beside him intently regarding the culinary operations of some boatmen who were cutting up fish and rolling curry *masala* for their evening meal.

The sun was setting in unspeakable glory behind a low bank of violet-tinted clouds, and for a moment the great orb seemed poised on the horizon, ere it descended into the bosom of the mighty Ganges, which was just visible beyond a low desert of sandy *char*.

A long flight of flamingoes or other water birds traced a dark zig-zag line against his flaming disc as they winged their flight to still wilder haunts, and the distant palms, like needle points, stood out in black relief against the sunset glow on the other side of the river, while nearer at hand a herd of huge black buffaloes were wending their way homewards across the shining sands, driven by a speck of a boy.

There was the familiar and pungent scent of burning cow-dung in the air, and distant voices sounded near. The peace of evening had fallen over everything, and Staples was glad to be still and enjoy it.

Presently a rather dirty-looking native, with a blue *pugri* and brass badge, approached and presented a note to the District Superintendent with a low salaam. Staples took it and read it.



"A NATIVE APPROACHED AND PRESENTED A NOTE TO THE DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT WITH A LOW SALAAM."

"Hajigunge Factory,
"Tuesday.

"DEAR STAPLES,—If you have a grain of Christian charity in your composition, dine with me this evening. I can put you up for the night. I have not seen a white face since I left Calcutta a month ago, and I have almost forgotten my mother tongue. This accursed place is the abomination of desolation, but I am doing what I can to save something from the wreck. Since that fool E—— set himself to ruin the indigo trade everything has gone to the dogs, and we are beggared.

"Yours sincerely,
"ANTHONY REILLY."

Staples gave the man a verbal message to the effect that he would be at the factory by eight (the usual Indian dinner hour), and then called his bearer, whom he instructed to order round the cart at seven sharp, for Hajigunge was a good four miles off, and he did not know what the road might be like.

Punctually to the time the bamboo cart came round with a game little country-bred pony named Skittles between the shafts, and the District Superintendent mounted and drove off, the *sais* hanging on precariously at the back, apparently by one toe.

It was a glorious night. The moon was full, and the whole country, flat as a pancake for hundreds of miles, lay bathed in her ghostly radiance. You could have seen to pick up a pin, or to read the smallest print; and the heavy dew glistened like hoar frost on the short turf, for it was December and the cold weather had set in.

The road was utterly lonely and deserted, and not a single human being did they meet, though they could hear the distant sound of tom-toming in the villages, and see faint lights gleaming amongst the trees.

The night wind rustled mournfully amongst the dead branches of the palms, and far away across the waste sounded the melancholy cry of the jackals, rising and falling on the still air; otherwise all was silent as the grave.

They were nearing the fifth mile post from Sultangunge, when suddenly a figure appeared on the *bund* ahead—so suddenly, indeed, that it seemed to have sprung out of the ground, for Staples, who had his eyes fixed on the road in front of him, had noticed nothing the moment before. It was the figure of a female, and her white garments seemed to concentrate the light of the moon, as white objects do. Nine-tenths of the Bengalis, male or female, wear white, so there was nothing peculiar in that; but what did strike Staples as singular was that a woman should be there alone at that hour, and in such a deserted spot, for native women are timid and gregarious.

Now, Bengalis have a particularly annoying habit of never turning out of the way of vehicles. You may shout, swear, and all but drive over them, and they will not take the least notice. I myself have often seen them walk slap into a carriage driven rapidly through the streets of Calcutta, just as if they were bent on committing suicide; and in the crowded thoroughfares of the native bazaars the *sais* has always to jump down and clear a passage.

The female in question appeared in no way different from her species. As she drew near Staples shouted at her, but with no effect.

Then the *sais* turned his head, and shouted too, using some of those vigorous epithets in which the vernacular of India is so rich. But still the woman came on, as if she had had the whole *bund* to herself, swerving neither to the right nor the left, just like a blind person.

She was close upon them, when something in her appearance caused the District Superintendent to rise in his seat, and utter a sudden exclamation. But it was too late. The woman went down under the horse's hoofs.

"My God, she's killed!" cried Staples, dragging back the frightened animal with all the power of his sinewy arms, while the *sais* sprang down and rushed round to the horse's head.

But Skittles did not wait for him. He reared straight on end, and then dashed madly down the *bund* into the paddy field, dragging the bamboo cart behind him.

Staples had thrown himself out, and now the Police Sahib and the *sais* stood and stared at one another blankly. Instead of the bleeding body of the woman they had expected to find, there was—nothing. Not a vestige of anything or anybody. It was as if the earth had opened and swallowed her up.

The long straight *bund*, with its dewy turf, lay glistening in the moonlight, looking like frosted silver; the paddy fields were deserted; not a trace of a human being was to be seen far or near.

"What on earth was the thing?" exclaimed Staples, speaking English in his bewilderment, and staring all around him. "And where can it have vanished to?"

"Sahib," replied the *sais*, who was shaking all over, and whose black face was blanched to an unearthly grey, "it was not a Bengali woman; it was a mem sahib. I saw her."

"'Mem sahib' or no 'mem sahib,' where the dickens is she gone?" said Staples.

"*Khudda janta!*" (God knows) answered the *sais*, shrugging his shoulders, and glancing round with a shudder.

However, there was nothing to be gained by staying there, and Skittles having been recaptured, they mounted the considerably damaged cart once more, and drove on to their destination without further accident. Another mile brought them within sight of Hajigunge factory.

Reilly came out to meet his guest, and gave him a hearty welcome. He was a tall, gaunt, loose-limbed man of forty or thereabouts, in a coat of Berhampore silk, who would have looked all the better for the ministrations of the village barber. Still, he had the air of a gentleman.

The two men went into the house together, and dinner was served shortly after in a room giving on to the veranda.

Staples was rather silent during the meal; but Reilly, who was full of satisfaction at having someone to talk to, did not appear to notice the young official's abstraction. When dinner was over the two men adjourned to the veranda overlooking the gardens. There were plenty of bamboo chairs of all sorts and sizes, and the Urya bearer, an imposing-looking gentleman, in a stupendous *pugri* and vermilion caste mark, brought out a box of cheroots and the inevitable *brandi pani*, which is the staff of life to thirsty Anglo-Indians.



"THE HORSE REARED STRAIGHT ON END AND DASHED MADLY INTO THE PADDY FIELD."

The night air was fragrant with the scent of the jasmine and roses, and more especially with the heavy perfume of the flowers on a big chumpa tree close at hand. At a little distance was a thick hedge of the "moonlight cactus," a species with waxy white flowers which blooms only at night, and which looked quite ghostly in the moonbeams. At dawn the blossoms shrivel up and die, and by sunrise nothing is left of them.

All was marvellously still. Sometimes a flying fox lumbered by on heavy flapping wings, or an owl hooted in the adjacent

thicket, where the fireflies were holding high carnival; but for the most part nothing was to be heard but the ceaseless whirr of myriads of grass insects.

Up to this time Staples had said nothing about his adventure on the *bund;* but as he and his host sat there in the semi-darkness, he cleared his throat, and commenced his story, though not without hesitation, for he had an idea that Reilly would ridicule the whole thing.

However, Reilly did nothing of the sort. He sat and listened attentively, puffing away at his cigar, and throwing in an occasional interjection or question.

Staples related what had occurred clearly and graphically, and when he had finished his story, he said, "I daresay you will laugh at me for an ass, but the whole thing has made me feel jolly queer. For the life of me I can't account for how she disappeared. If she had been a ghost she could not have vanished more completely. There was not cover enough to have hidden a mongoose, nor anything that she could possibly have got behind, barring that D. P. W. mile post, and that would not have sheltered her long."

Still Reilly was silent as he watched the smoke from his cheroot curl upwards. "It *is* odd, certainly," he said, at last. Then, after a moment's pause, "You don't happen to believe in ghosts, I suppose?"

"By Jingo, no; not at the end of the nineteenth century," exclaimed Staples.

"Well, I don't know why we should not believe in them as much at the end of the nineteenth century as at the beginning," said Reilly, slowly. "Besides, ghosts are coming into fashion again since Stead took to poking them up."

"*You* don't believe in them, I imagine?"

"I don't know," replied Reilly, slowly and thoughtfully. "The longer I live the more inclined I am to believe that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy. Something strange happened to me not long ago."

"What was it?" asked Staples, eagerly.

"Well," said Reilly, knocking off the ashes of his cheroot against the arm of his Penang chair, "it was in this way: One night I had to send a messenger down to Sultangunge dispensary, sharp, to get a bottle of cholera mixture for one of the coolies who was taken ill. The man was pretty bad, and the messenger had orders to put his best leg foremost. Well, he started off, but he had not been gone half an hour when he came flying back as if Old Nick himself was behind him. I never saw a man so convulsed with terror; his eyes seemed starting from his head, and he fell at my feet in a sort of fit, foaming at the mouth. He was speechless; and, as nothing we could do could get him round, I finally sent for a *duli* and had him trotted off to the dispensary. Next day by chance Woodward, the Civil Surgeon, turned up on inspection duty, and I told him all about it. He saw the man Buddu, and examined him carefully; and finally gave it as his opinion that the whole thing was a fraud. The man was shamming, he thought; anyhow, he could not find out anything wrong with him. But in three days Buddu died.

"Just before he went under he opened his eyes full on my face with the first gleam of intelligence he had shown since the fatal night, and said, in a sort of hoarse whisper, "I saw the mem sahib." Then he gave up the ghost, and I—well, I have to support his widow."

"Strange indeed! But have you no clue to the mystery?" asked Staples, with much interest. "What do the natives say?"

Reilly shrugged his shoulders. "What's the use of listening to bazaar *gup?*" he said. "However, there is not a servant in this house who would go along that *bund* at night for all you could offer him. If I have occasion to send to Sultangunge they always make a wide detour. It is rather inconvenient sometimes, and I have tried physical persuasion more than once; but it's of no use. They swear the *bund* is haunted, and that they prefer a thrashing to the chance of encountering the *bhut*."

"But whose is the ghost supposed to be?" demanded Staples. "The woman I saw to-night was no native. I saw her face for an instant. I shall not forget it in a hurry," and the District Superintendent shuddered.

"We had better turn the subject," said his host, cheerfully. "It does not do to talk of ghosts by moonlight, and in a haunted-looking old barracks like this. Let's go inside to the lamplight; we may as well sit there as here. By the way, did you ever meet Trefusis?"

"Do you mean Trefusis of the Civil Service?" asked Staples.

"Yes, F. W. Trefusis. He's at home on furlough now."

"I know he is," answered the District

Superintendent. "He found it convenient to take leave when his wife died. There were awfully queer things said. No, I don't know him, and don't want to. He is a bad lot from all I've heard, and I sincerely hope my luck will never send me to a district of which he is collector. I knew a fellow who was with him once, and he said the way he treated Mrs. Trefusis was the scandal of the station; used to have all sorts of shady characters in the house with her; and half her time she could not wear a low-necked dress at dances, because of her delicate chest, *she* said, but people knew better. The men could hardly keep their hands off him."

Reilly nodded. "It's all true, and worse, too," he said, thoughtfully, and looking at the red tip of his cigar. "I knew her well. She was a gentle, quiet little woman, with soft, clinging ways, and big grey eyes. Not pretty, you know, but with something very taking about her. He was tired of her, so he deliberately set to work to kill her with ill-usage. She died in this house."

"Died in this house!" repeated Staples. "What brought her here?"

"Well, you see—take another peg," and Reilly passed the bottle of Exshaw No. 1, with a hand that was hardly as steady as usual—"Trefusis was at that time acting as collector of Chota Jahannampur for Chichele, who was at home on sick leave; and he was out here in camp, or at least he was at Sultangunge.

"Mrs. Trefusis was in very ill-health (she was always delicate), and had entreated to be allowed to stay behind in the *sudder* (this is the ayah's story), but Trefusis would not hear of it—sick as she was, he dragged her out into these swamps.

"She grew worse, and finally was brought here in a *palki*, for the weather was hot and muggy, and the tents were insufferable. This house was empty then; merely in charge of a *chaukidar*, and—well, here she died."

Reilly paused for a moment, and his voice was husky with emotion. Staples said nothing. At last Reilly continued—

"The news of her death was kept quiet. I suppose the dispensary baboo gave a certificate of some sort. A *mistri* from the bazaar knocked together a few brandy-boxes, and made a coffin. The tent *kalassis* dug a hole in the *bund*, and she was buried—just beyond the fifth mile post, you know."

"And were there no inquiries made?" asked Staples. "Was there no investigation into the cause of her death?"

"Inquiries? No. Who was there to inquire?" answered Reilly, in a dreamy tone. "She died of fever—so Trefusis said; and the Civil Surgeon of Chota Jahannampur was a native. *You* know how likely a Bengali baboo is to interrogate the Collector Sahib. Mrs. Trefusis had been dead a week before the news reached the *sudder*."



"STAPLES RELATED TO REILLY WHAT HAD OCCURRED. 'I CAN'T ACCOUNT FOR HOW SHE DISAPPEARED,' HE SAID."

"And the ayah: had she nothing to say?"

"Plenty, no doubt; but who listens to an ayah's *bak-bak?* Besides, she returned to her home and relations somewhere beyond—the desert of Sind, I expect, and it is said she took a good deal of jewellery with her. But now don't you think we had better be going to roost? It is the witching hour of midnight, when churchyards yawn and graves give up their dead. Hi, bearer! *butti la 'o.*"



THE LITTLE SILVER CROSS.

A TRAGEDY OF A CAB.

By Lister Maurice.

Illustrated by E. S. Klempner.

AMONG the few treasures I possess is a little silver cross.

I keep it, with a lock of my mother's hair, the rose I wore in my buttonhole the evening I proposed to Lilian, a photograph of baby, and the first guinea I ever earned, in a secret drawer in my writing-table.

And while I am accustomed to look occasionally at my other treasures, I rarely undo the tissue paper wrapped round the little silver cross. Yet the little silver cross will be buried with me; not hung round my neck, but clasped in my dead right hand.

It is ten years now since the events occurred in which the little silver cross played so important a part. Ten solid, respectable, prosperous, happy years. So prosperous and happy that it almost needs an unfolding of the tissue paper and a glance at the little silver cross to assure me that what I propose to relate is not a nightmare phantasy of an ordinarily imaginative mind, but a literal, terrible fact.

I have only told the whole of the story to three people as yet—to Lilian, who believes in it as firmly as I do; to Jack Fenwick, who says it is all somethinged nonsense; and to a clergyman cousin, who advised me to send it to the "Psychical Research."

It was the end of May. London was at its best and brightest, and the season at its height. All the world was young, and Lilian and I were just engaged.

We had



"THE MAN LURCHED FORWARD AND STRETCHED OUT A PAIR OF BONY WHITE HANDS TO SNATCH AT ME."

only parted a few minutes before at the hall door in Sussex Square.

A glorious day had been succeeded by a perfect night. High in the heavens the summer moon held her court, turning even prosaic London into fairyland. Across the square floated the sound of dance music. The lamps of hurrying hansoms flashed hither and thither like fireflies in the shadows. The night was full of life and love and Lilian.

My future father-in-law's cigar was of the best, I had dined wisely and well, and the ticklish question of settlements had been arranged with unexpected cordiality.

Altogether it was a young man on excellent terms with himself and the world in general who emerged into the Bayswater Road as the clocks were striking eleven.

I was bound, in deference to my future prospects, to a political crush in Mayfair, and, having plenty of time, determined to walk and finish my cigar on the way.

I wish I could remember with any exactitude of what I was thinking as I strolled leisurely up towards the Marble Arch. I recollect repulsing a whining beggar at the corner of Hyde Park Gardens; I recall feeling it almost a shame to drown the scent of the lilacs with tobacco smoke; I have an impression I wondered whether it would not be rather a tight fit setting up house on eight hundred a year. But what was precisely in my mind at the moment I reached Hyde Park Street I cannot tell.

At any rate, at Hyde Park Street my progress across the road was arrested by a hansom coming swiftly at right angles towards me. I might, with a rush, have reached the kerb; but I was not in a mood for unnecessary exertion, so I stepped back to allow the cab to pass.

I often wonder how it was that, in the space of a few seconds, I was able to photograph upon my mind, with a precision that the lapse of ten years has wholly failed to dim, all the details of that hansom cab. In the twinkling of an eye I took it all in. I saw the good-looking young driver, in a light sporting coat, with a Gloire de Dijon in his buttonhole, the little restive bay mare, the well-built "Forder" with its nickel fittings—all this I saw, and something more. I saw what the cab contained. There could be no mistake about it. The moon shone full into the cab, and there was a lamp inside. At first the occupant looked like a heap of black clothes. I could distinguish no form. Then I saw it was a man bareheaded, huddled up in one corner, apparently asleep or drunk, with his head dangling in a strange sort of way on his chest.

As the cab came up to me, the man suddenly jerked up his head, lurched forward, and stretched out a pair of bony white hands as though to snatch at me. I then saw that his throat was cut from ear to ear. He was in evening clothes, and his shirt-front and coat were stained with blood. But his face! I have read of hate, despair, corruption, and hell. All four were stamped upon that fearful countenance, and in gazing upon it, frozen with horror, I seemed to sound their depths. And the awful thing was laughing at me. I swear it laughed. It meant to get at me if it could; for as the cab whirled by it leered at me under the blue silk, lace-trimmed curtains, and one of those horrible bony white hands crept round and almost touched the wheel. The whole thing only lasted a few seconds, and the cab was gone.

I suppose it was unmanly, but the horror of it all utterly broke me down. Spiritless and shaking in every limb, I staggered on to the kerb and cannoned against a young policeman leisurely pursuing his beat, bull's-eye in hand.

Disregarding his paternal "Hold up, governor," I clung to a very impassive blue cloth arm and gasped—

"Stop that cab. There has been a murder, or suicide, or something terrible. A man has nearly cut his head off."

"If there's a man with 'is 'ead off, 'e'll be stopped sharp enough, never fear."

I did not gainsay this unanswerable remark, but allowed myself to be propped against the pediment of a Corinthian door column and carefully inspected with the bull's-eye. The dazzling operation over, the young policeman looked carefully up and down the road. Then he fumbled in the pocket of his tunic and produced a flat glass bottle.

"You've 'ad a turn," he said. "Take a pull at this. It's all right as long as the sergeant doesn't come along."

I gulped down the fiery draught, murmured my thanks, and began searching in every pocket but the right one for the inevitable half-crown. With admirable tact and averted countenance my blue-coated

friend filled in the awkward pause with a thrilling narrative of the "turn" he had received on witnessing the perishing of an elderly female, "fourteen stun if she was an ounce," under the wheels of a Starch Green 'bus a month after he had joined the force. The half-crown produced symptoms of a still further flood of reminiscences, but by that time I had recovered.

I refused an offer to be "seen off" the beat, and pursued my way, not to the political crush, but to the club and Jack Fenwick, whose cheery scepticism and breezy chaff eventually succeeded in making bed and sleep possible.

Next day I feverishly but vainly hunted through the morning and evening papers for "Horrible Tragedy in a Cab," "Shocking Cab Mystery," or even "Melancholy Suicide in a Public Conveyance." I could discover no trace of anything of the sort.

On the day following, and the succeeding days, my search was equally fruitless. At the end of a week I inquired at Scotland Yard. No occurrence of the kind had been reported.

Gradually the immediate horror of the mysterious experience began to fade from my mind. I gave up thinking of it always and everywhere. I ceased to dream every night of that ghastly, waggling head and those bony white hands.

At last I almost brought myself to believe that I had been the victim either of an inexplicable hallucination or some grim practical joke. It was some time, however, before I cared to venture alone in a hansom, especially by night. Even this nervousness eventually wore off, and by the time the season waned and my wedding day drew near, I had all but forgotten the whole matter.

It was some three weeks before our wedding, a stifling July night, with thunder in the air. Lilian and I had been sitting under the awning on the balcony, talking very seriously. Lilian always took the right view of life, and from the first seemed to lead me by the hand to a spiritual standpoint natural to her, but without her as inaccessible to me as the mountains in the moon.

It was a curious conversation. It began with the design of our new drawing-room carpet; it ended with the warfare of the human soul with the powers of evil. As usual, Lilian's views were as definite as mine were vague. I do not know how far she converted me, but I know I rose to go, loving her more than ever, and with an indefinable sense of peace and protection that comforted me.



"'YOU WON'T LAUGH AT ME, FRANK, IF I ASK YOU TO DO SOMETHING FOR ME?' SAID LILIAN."

Somehow or other, I needed comfort. Perhaps it was the sultry heat and coming storm that depressed me; but as we stood for a minute or two side by side, gazing silently out over the dark, square garden, with the thunder growling in the distance, I felt eerie and apprehensive.

"I must go, dear," I said at last.

As we turned to enter the drawing-room, Lilian hesitated.

"You won't laugh at me, Frank, if I ask you to do something for me?"

"Is there anything in the world I would not do for you?"

Lilian laughed rather nervously.

"Well, it's nothing very serious, only I was afraid you might think it silly. I have a little silver cross here. It was given me by Berthe, my old French nurse, when she was dying. It belonged to her sister, who was a nun somewhere in Spain. Berthe prized it above everything in the world. She asked me to keep it for her sake, and to give it to no one unless to my husband. I have been wanting to give it to you, Frank, for a long time; but I—I thought you might think me sentimental and foolish. Somehow I feel to-night that I ought to ask you to take it and keep it for my sake."



"LILIAN CAME DOWN THE STEPS. 'YOU'VE GOT THE CROSS?' SHE SAID. I TOOK IT OUT OF MY POCKET AND HELD IT UP."

Lilian's voice faltered, and there was a pause.

"Frank,"—it was Lilian's voice again—"you will keep it?"

"Till I die."

Then we went through the drawing-room, down the stairs, and into the hall.

"Cab, sir?"

"Yes." And while Blinker whistled, Lilian and I said good-night.

"Where to, sir?"

"The Cholmondeley Club."

Glancing up at the smart young driver, I seemed to recognise him. At that moment there was a bright flash of lightning and a long, threatening roll of thunder. The little bay mare made a jump forward in the shafts.

Lilian, standing on the steps, looked frightened.

"I hope the storm won't come on before you get to the club."

"Oh, no. It is miles off yet. Now run in." I laughed cheerily. Lilian did not run in, but came quickly down the steps.

"You've got the little cross, Frank?"

I took the cross out of my waistcoat pocket and held it up. Lilian smiled and kissed her hand. The next moment the cab plunged into the sultry darkness. I sat in a corner in deep thought, the rays of the lamp behind me falling on the little silver cross which I still held in my hand. Why were the features and dress of the driver so familiar to me? Why did that familiarity

suggest something ominous and unpleasant? There was a memory at the back of my mind, so to speak, that was roused, and that I knew was just about to assert itself—a memory I was conscious I should tremble to face. I looked out into the darkness—a fidgety little bay mare. My eyes wandered round the cab—blue silk, lace-trimmed curtains. No, no! It was not that! It could not be! God have mercy upon me—*it was!* I had seen the smart young driver, the fidgety bay mare, the blue silk curtains before, and I remembered when and where.

I cannot pretend to describe the sensation which seized me at that awful moment. I can only liken it to an icy hand laid upon my heart, stopping the flow of blood through my veins. All power of movement left me. I could stir neither hand nor foot, nor could I utter sound or cry. And yet I was quite conscious.

I remember perfectly, as we were passing through Hyde Park Square, seeing a soldier talking to a servant girl at the corner, and at one of the houses the footman was standing on the steps whistling for a cab.

Yet all the time my heart was an icicle, and I was motionless as a block of stone.

It was as we entered Hyde Park Street that I was roused—roused completely; for though I still sat quiet as a statue, every nerve in my body was alert and thrilling. It was so gentle at first, that awakening—more like a caress than anything else. But I knew that a supreme moment in my life had come, when I felt that arm stealing gently round my neck.

I was in the right-hand corner of the cab. The arm came round over my right shoulder. It was then I saw the hand—a bony white hand—creeping stealthily up to my throat. I know I gave a horrible sort of screech.

The next moment I was locked in a fierce death struggle with the man, or devil, or whatever it was, who was trying to strangle me. Oh, the agony of that fearful fight! Shall I ever forget the awful head, the rattling breath, the sickening smell of the blood with which I was deluged!

Twice I tore those long, cruel fingers from my throat. Twice I hurled the hideous thing off me. At last I began to get exhausted. There was a good deal of lightning and thunder, and the cab seemed to be going at a fearful rate, and swaying from side to side.

Then the creature came at me again. It got me fairly by the throat that time. I could hear it gibbering as it forced me back on to the seat. I tried to call out. I could make no sound. At last, with a supreme effort, I wrenched the creature's hands away once more. At that moment there was a brilliant flash of lightning, an appalling explosion of thunder, and I was pitched forward into some abyss of darkness and, thank God, of peace.



"I WAS LOCKED IN A FIERCE DEATH STRUGGLE WITH THE MAN WHO WAS TRYING TO STRANGLE ME."

* * * *

The next thing I remember was Jack Fenwick's cheery voice saying—

"It's all right. The dear old chap is

coming round!" and I awoke to find myself in bed, with ice on my head, in a strange room.

Jack was grinning at me from ear to ear, with his eyes full of tears, at the foot of the bed; Lilian was kneeling by the side, white and scared, but trying to smile; while a benevolent-looking grey-haired individual was standing by the mantelpiece pouring out something into a medicine glass.

In a day or two I was well enough to be told what had happened, and in less than a week I was able to be taken from the doctor's house to Sussex Square. It appeared that the mare had been frightened by the lightning, had bolted, smashed the cab to smithereens, and thrown me into the road. The driver had been killed on the spot, while I had been picked up, suffering from nothing worse than a slight concussion of the brain.

Curiously enough, Jack was walking down the Bayswater Road when the smash occurred, and was one of the first to haul me out of the *débris* and have me carried into the neighbouring doctor's house. My own recollection was for some time an entire blank.

All I could remember at first was saying good night to Lilian in Sussex Square. Gradually, however, my memory stole back. First I recalled the poor young driver in the sporting coat. Lilian was looking after his wife and baby. He had only been married a year. Then I recollected the restive bay mare, then the blue silk curtains with lace trimmings, and then——

It was early morning when it all came back to me. All day I longed for Jack's usual visit. At last he came. We were alone. Lilian was writing the wedding invitations in the drawing-room. After several false starts I summoned up courage to say—

"How soon did you recognise me on that night, Jack?"

"A minute or two before the mare made for the railings. I had to jump out of the way pretty sharp to save myself, I can tell you. She came at the railings like a shot out of a gun. If she had had Old Nick behind her she could not have done worse. I never saw such a thing in my life—as I told the coroner."

"What—what was I doing?"

"Behaving like a brick—sitting as still as a statue. Your face was very white, it is true, but you were not moving an eyelid. If you had lost your head and tried to jump out you would have been killed on the spot."

"Did you see anybody or anything in the cab with me?"

Jack looked at me rather apprehensively.

"You must not talk too much, old chap; you are still weak, remember. No, there was no one in the cab with you."

"But," I insisted, "did you notice nothing curious about the cab or me?"

"Nothing whatever. I tell you you were sitting as still as Nelson's Monument. There was nothing odd about the cab or you, except—well, that seemed strange: when we got you to the doctor's we found you had something clenched in your hand. It was some time before we could get your hand open, and when we did we found it was——"

Jack paused.

"What?"

"Well, I see you have it on the table beside you: that little silver cross."

ANOTHER VOLUME—Volume III.—of the HARMSWORTH MAGAZINE is completed with the publication of this number.

The six numbers which comprise this volume should now be bound, and for this purpose we have prepared a very charming cover.

The ground of the cover is a delicious green, and the design and lettering is in gold and black.

Bound in this cover, the numbers make a most attractive volume.

A very complete index has been prepared, and the cover and index can be had of any bookseller or newsman for the sum of eighteenpence.

A new volume of the HARMSWORTH MAGAZINE will begin with the next number, and new subscribers should order it at once.

The future numbers of the Magazine will be better even than those already published.

THE HARMONY OF HORROR.

A PIANIST'S MOST TERRIBLE EXPERIENCE.

By Havelock Ettrick.

Illustrated by R. W. Wallace.

"YOUR carriage awaits you, monsieur."

"Thanks. I shall not, however, require it. I am walking."

So saying, I wrapped my warm fur mantle closer about me, and stepped out into the brilliant night. The evening had been one of wild intoxicating success, and I thought that the walk across Paris would help to soothe my nerves, naturally too highly strung; and now, with the cries of an applauding multitude still ringing in my ears, strained to a tension that was unbearable, I must be alone.



The air was keen and frosty, the sky clear, the brilliant stars scintillated and sparkled like diamonds in the hair of some dusky beauty; the gleaming constellations appeared twice as radiant, surpassing in magnificence their usual appearance.

I heard the clock in the Tour de St. Jacques strike the quarter before three as I rapidly made my way along the deserted street. The elation of my spirits, the wild exultation of my heart, was but intensified by the loneliness; the clear frosty air was as champagne in its power to keep buoyant my throbbing brain. I was wildly, intensely happy, I trod on glorified air.

And yet, had I not cause for happiness?

The ceaseless toil for many years, the drudgery and hardships to which I had been no stranger, had brought at last their reward.

I was famous, and Paris, the world, lay at my feet!

The wheel of fortune had turned, and I, the poor obscure student of Dresden Conservatoire, the half-starved, always penniless aspirant for musical fame, was the darling of Paris! After having met with unqualified success both at Berlin and Buda Pesth, I had taken Paris by storm, and the musicians, critics, and high-born dames, composers, all alike, of the gay city, hung over my chair drinking in with delight the liquid

"I WAS THROWN VIOLENTLY TO THE GROUND, AND A HEAVY WRAP DEADENED MY CRIES FOR HELP."

notes as they dropped from my long, supple fingers.

Occupied with these pleasing reflections, I turned into the Rue Royal, which was by this time utterly deserted, save for a few prowling cabs on the search for night fares. I passed, and left on the right, the great church of the Madeleine, and struck into the labyrinth of quiet streets that lie between the Boulevard Haussmann and the main avenue of the Malesherbes.

Deep sunk in thought, I scarcely noticed that the footsteps of a man had been gaining rapidly upon me, and it was only upon hearing them almost at my side that I turned round to see who it was that shared my nocturnal peregrinations. As I did so, however, an arm was thrust into my own, and I saw my uninvited comrade, a pleasant voice at the same time exclaiming—

"Ah, Monsieur Raoul Kaiservitch, you walk quickly! I left the Châtelet but a few moments after yourself, and I have had the greatest difficulty to overtake you. I see," he continued, "that you do not recognise me. Well, more people know a celebrity than a celebrity knows. I was present to-night at the supper given in your honour, and am one of the many humble worshippers at the shrine of genius."

"You are very amiable," was my rejoinder. Glancing again at my companion, I saw that he wore a dark moustache and imperial, but otherwise his face was invisible, being enveloped in the heavy fur mantle that the chilliness of the night rendered welcome; a broad slouched hat shaded the upper portion of his face, and I could but dimly perceive the dark flashing eyes that occasionally met my own.

"You are bound for the Rue des Sept Chiens, is it not so?" he inquired.

"That is my destination: I trust I am not taking you out of your way," I replied.

"Far from it, our roads lie together: this little street that we are approaching is a short cut for both of us. I fancy that I know Paris better than you," my companion said, laughingly. "I was born and bred on the boulevards."

"True," was my rejoinder, "I have only been here for the best part of a month; but I begin to find my way about with ease, though I generally confine myself to the main streets; I have no bump of locality."

Thus chatting, we turned up the quiet side street mentioned by my companion.

What followed I am almost at a loss to describe; the incidents are fused into one hazy remembrance, and at this length of time are well-nigh lost to my recollection.

I can recall a scuffle of feet, a hurried whispering; then I was thrown violently to the ground, and a heavy wrap deadened my cries for help. I had no doubt but both my friend and myself had fallen into the hands of a band of robbers, and that such money as I possessed was the motive for the attack.

I was lifted from the ground, and placed on the seat of a carriage which would appear to have been in waiting. Helpless, and the victim of a plot evidently prearranged, I could do nothing but await developments. I was held in my seat by four powerful hands, the owners of which, apparently anticipating some resistance on my part, prevented the smallest movement. The drive was a silent one, and seemed to me of interminable length; the jolting and bumping over the rough cobbles told me that the main streets were being avoided, and that our course lay along the quieter and less frequented by-ways of Paris.

At length, with a sudden jolt and the throwing of the horse upon its haunches, the vehicle came to a standstill. Swiftly and in perfect silence I was lifted from my seat, and conveyed into a house, a heavy door closed behind me, and I knew that, whatever the reason of my abduction, I was completely in the power of my captors.

I felt myself hurried along a passage, and pushed into a room, the agreeable warmth of which at once struck me.

The heavy cloak that enveloped my head was removed, a glare of light struck my dazzled eyes: then, recovering myself, I looked around me.

When my eyes had become accustomed to the blaze of light with which the room was flooded, I saw that it was for some definite purpose that I had been brought thither; I was evidently expected.

A group of men, numbering perhaps some two dozen, sat in semicircular fashion round a full concert grand piano. I saw with surprise that upon the book-rest stood one of my own programmes. Was it, I asked myself, the custom in Paris for artists to be violently assaulted and dragged against their will to give compulsory performances in the small hours of the morning?

A second glance at the faces of the men, who sat in stolid silence around the piano,

told me instinctively that it was for no ordinary musical performance that they waited.

The men were none of them of less than middle age, many of them wore grey beards and possessed but scanty locks. Upon the faces of all there was a strange look of determination, in some cases it amounted to fierceness; they were men, I felt sure, whom one might fear, but shrink from useless appeals to their sense of mercy; men who conveyed swiftly to my brain the impression that they carried their lives in their hands!

To what place had I been brought? As my eyes travelled round the silent group, they were arrested by the sight of one man; the fashion of the chair in which he sat, and the manner of his occupation of it, was such as I had never before seen.

The chair was placed at the back of the room some yards away from the piano with its surrounding audience, and was in the shade. The strong lamps, that cast such a glare down upon the fierce resolute faces that conveyed such a disagreeable impression to my mind, left the end of the room in comparative darkness, and I could but dimly see its outline. It seemed to be fashioned of some dully gleaming metal, and was raised upon two steps of what appeared to be glass. The man was bound hand and foot by leather straps, which rendered the smallest movement an impossibility; upon his head was placed a metal cap to which was attached a wire which ran up to the ceiling of the room. The man was pale and livid, giving no signs of life except



"THE CLOAK THAT ENVELOPED MY HEAD WAS REMOVED, AND I SAW TWO DOZEN MEN ROUND A GRAND PIANO."

from his black beady eyes, which followed my smallest movement with intense anxiety.

The audience had their backs turned to the mysterious chair and its occupant; only the player at the piano would face in their direction.

Who was the man thus bound?

What was the meaning of the silent audience, the piano, the entrapped musician?

As I stood irresolute, the figure of a man rose from a chair placed close beside the piano, and advanced with outstretched hand towards me. He struck me as being of about fifty years of age, and he wore a full black beard, and was dressed entirely in dark clothes.

"Welcome, Monsieur Kaiservitch! You will excuse the somewhat peremptory manner in which you have been brought into our midst."

"Is it the custom in Paris to waylay musicians, monsieur? I judge from the open piano that my professional services are expected. I cannot deny that I would choose any time rather than the present for giving them."

"Unfortunately, Monsieur Kaiservitch, we have no option but to require your artistic services at the present time. It is for this reason that you were followed from the Châtelet Theatre and brought hither. I speak in the name of my comrades when I assure you that if you will do as we counsel you, no harm of any description will come to you, and that you will be safely at your residence within the space of one hour from now."

"I thank you," was my reply, "for the assurance. May I ask what is required of me?"

"Simply to play on the piano that you see before you—and which, let me add, you will find no mean instrument—three pieces of music which have been selected from the programme that you performed this evening at the Châtelet Theatre."

The words of the man before me conveyed a command rather than a request; so, putting aside my natural curiosity, not unmixed with resentment at the peremptory manner in which my professional services were demanded, I bowed to the circle of silent men facing me, and seated myself at the piano.

I was dead tired, and even the pleasure of touching such an exquisite instrument as the piano proved itself to be could not arouse within me the energy to do justice to the music I set myself down to interpret. I was haunted, too, by the sight of the man's face who sat bound hand and foot in the chair, which I could dimly see gleaming with dull metallic lustre in the shadows at the further end of the room.

I fancied that, as I played, the man's face grew more haggard, and blanched to an even more ghastly whiteness. I played my first piece—a valse capricieuse of Liszt's: it was received in solemn silence, the chairman of the assembly—he who had first addressed me—alone giving a sign, by gravely bowing his head, that the music had been heard.

The dead silence of the room began to affect my nerves, already overwrought and unstrung by the strange proceedings of the past hour.

As I began the second piece marked for my performance, I could have sworn that a husky cry for mercy burst from the lips of the captive in the metal chair; his face was working convulsively, and I could see that the fingers of his tightly-strapped hands were twitching. The sight of it, added to the mystery of his being there at all, and the utter indifference of the other men in the room to his position, broke down what little of nervous force I had still left to me. I dropped my hands from the keyboard, and turned to the chairman of my grim audience.

"I cannot play more!"

He rose from his seat and came to my side. His full face, with its large, prominent eyes, looked strangely excited.

"You *must* play: you *must* perform the pieces marked on that programme."

"I must know before I do so the reason of this unnatural concert. Why is that man there bound into his chair: why does he watch my every movement with such horrible anxiety: why do you sit around me in such unbroken silence? I must and will know the reason of these unnatural proceedings."

For the space of a few seconds the man did not speak; he regarded me with a strange, fixed stare, that seemed to draw from me all power of resistance to his will, whatever it might be. I felt in the presence of a mesmerist, one who could compel me by the exercise of his powers to bend before his force of intellect, his concentration of mind.

"You *shall* know, and that without loss of time, the meaning of your surroundings. That man whom you see bound yonder is doomed to die, and he will meet his death at your hands! Sit down, Monsieur Kaiservitch," for I had started from my seat in horror. "You cannot by any possibility escape from being the medium through which the vengeance of an all-powerful society shall be wreaked upon one who has disobeyed its laws.

"Listen! All that you see in this room are members of a mighty organisation for the suppression of social abuses, a vast community that is spread over the face of the entire civilised world. By our laws certain offences committed by members are to be punished by death; equally by our laws that death is to be inflicted by someone not belonging to the society. So shall our hands be free from blood-guiltiness! Do you understand now?"

I began to grasp his meaning! I was to be the slaughterer, by some means yet unknown to me, of that wretched man bound so fast in the metal chair! Was there no escape? Could I not work upon the feelings of this diabolical crew to spare the intended victim? I looked, my hands trembling, my lips dull and parched, upon

the face of the man who awaited his death-blow. His eyes met mine, but in their glance I read but the misery of hopelessness: he doubtless knew better than myself the character of the men who had doomed him to death.

The chairman resumed his explanation, still holding me fascinated by his dark, gleaming eyes.

"The manner of this man's death will be as follows:—You will play the Chopin Nocturne in B flat that already you have performed to the delight of thousands this night; again you shall play it, but this time every note that you strike will bring mortal terror to the man who has broken the laws of his fraternity. This piano is connected with a powerful electric battery: *upon a certain chord in that Nocturne being played the communication will be made*, and a charge of electric current more than sufficient to kill ten men will enter that man's body, and he will then have paid the penalty of his disobedience!"

I sprang to my feet once more and faced my informant, who with set smile on his pale face regarded me fixedly.

"But this—this will be sheer murder, nothing less than murder," I cried. "Nothing on earth shall make me touch this piano again!"

He forced me with strong hand down upon the chair once more.

"You *will* play, Monsieur Raoul Kaiservitch. You *will* play!"

So saying, he took my two hands into his own and steadily looked at me. A sense of utter helplessness overcame me—my will seemed to disembody itself, to detach itself from my personality, to leave me powerless and weak, a puppet in the hands of the man who stood over me, never removing his eyes from my face.



"'YOU MUST PLAY,' HE SAID; 'YOU MUST PERFORM THE PIECES MARKED ON THAT PROGRAMME.'"

"Play!"

Obediently I turned to the piano; my fingers involuntarily began the opening phrase of the Nocturne. I played as one in his sleep; no power of resistance came to my aid. I was a mechanical automaton worked by the mesmeric power of a stronger will than my own.

The notes dropped one by one from under my fingers; the first movement of the Nocturne, with its searching, plaintive melody,

was finished, and I passed without pause on to the minor scheme of exquisite beauty. I watched as in a dream the face of the doomed man, knowing that as chord by chord formed themselves under my hands, the knell of death was sounding in his ears. Nearer and nearer drew the fatal harmony that would release the dread force which brought eternity to him; there was no hope, no possible accident that could spin out the threads of life for him.

Mechanically, and with no will of my own, I struck the long-sustained minor chord that forms the modulation wherein the melody returns to its first and earliest cry.

As I did so, I noticed that the faces of my audience turned with one accord towards the chair that stood in the shadow!



"AS I PLAYED I WATCHED AS IN A DREAM THE FACE OF THE DOOMED MAN."

I, too, looked!

The eyes of the doomed man were closed, a slight froth appeared on the parted lips, the muscles of the neck and hands stood out tense, but, as I dropped with horror my hands from the ivory keys, resumed their ordinary appearance; the jaw fell; I understood! The long-sustained chord had been that selected to deal the death blow; the man was dead, and I, Raoul Kaiservitch, was his executioner!

I dropped unconscious on to the floor, knowing and hearing nothing further.

* * * *

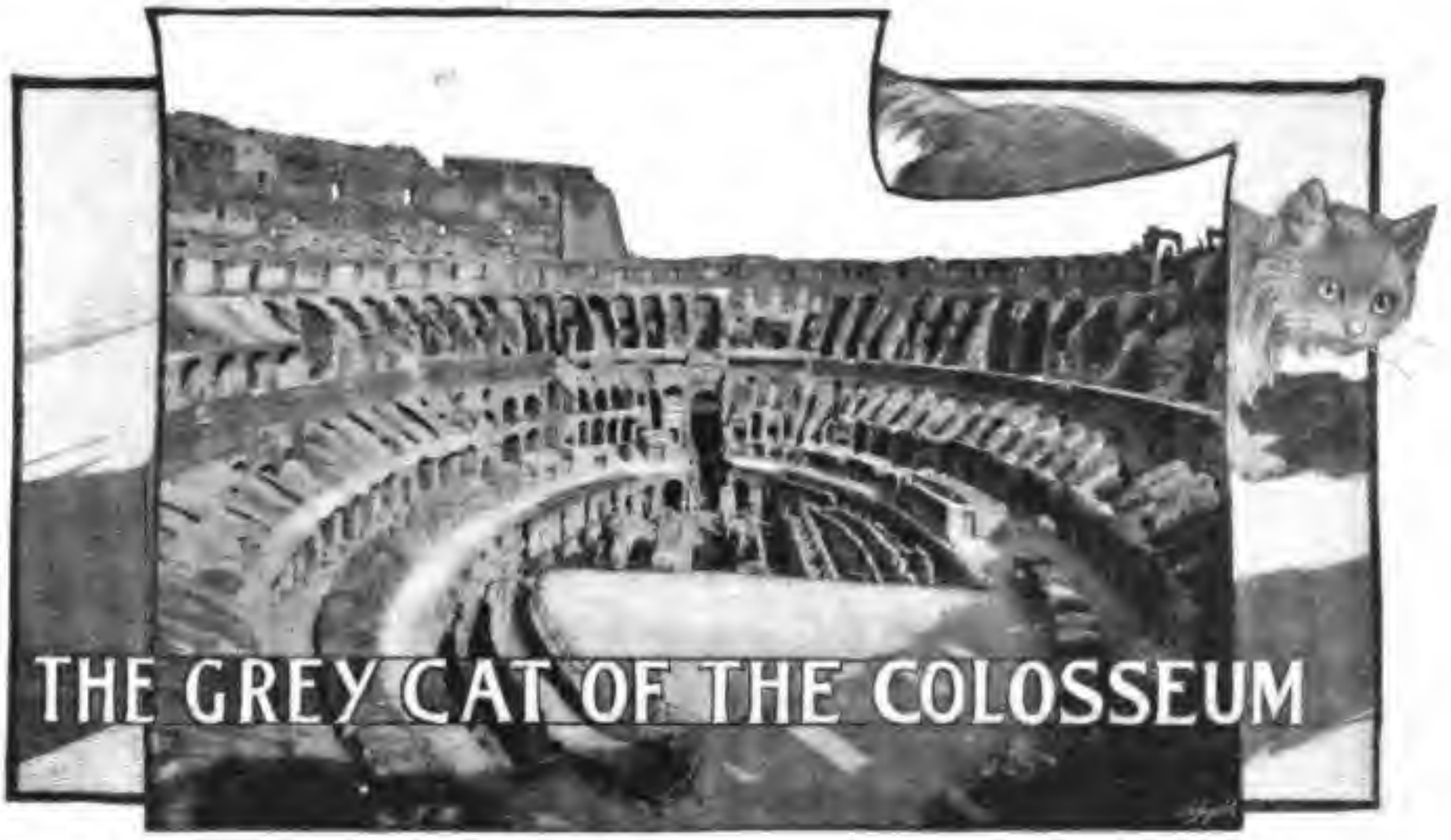
When I recovered myself I was lying in the shade of a doorway in the Rue des Sept Chiens; daylight was breaking, and I was alone, faint, weary, and hungry. Staggering to my feet, I regained in a few moments the house for which I had been bound when these dread things fell upon me.

Success has come to me, and as the years pass, fame has been coupled with my name; but never since that night have I played the B flat minor Nocturne of Chopin. I am haunted ever by the sight of a face, pale and livid, wherein the eyes watch my every movement with horrible intensity; I can hear the long-drawn minor harmony that opened the gate of the land of shadows to a helpless fellow creature who had done me no wrong.

Who were the men who thus entrapped me for their fell purpose?

What devilish Brotherhood was it that used me as the handle wherewith to deal death to one of their number?

I do not know; from that night to the present time I have seen or heard nothing of my companions of that dread hour in which my hands struck the Harmony of Death.



THE GREY CAT OF THE COLOSSEUM

A TERRIBLE EXPERIENCE.

By Sidney Pickering.

Illustrated by Harry Dixon.

TO the west the blood red of the sunset flamed and glowed through the great gaping windows; to the east, above the crumbling walls, in a sky rose-colour with reflected glory, hung the silver crescent of the new moon.

The last tourist had closed his Baedeker and departed. I was free to forget that such things as tourists existed. Seated on a marble-covered ledge a few feet above the ground level, I looked down into the narrow labyrinthine passages, the uncovered dungeon-like spaces, where once the wild beasts and their attendants waited for the summons which would call them up into the daylight of the vast arena. So looking, I reflected that the soul of the Colosseum, its evil soul, pagan still in spite of prayer and chant and benediction, stained with the crimes of many centuries, has there its special dwelling-place.

Something brushed lightly against my shoulder and dropped on to the pavement at my feet. It was a small grey cat.

She was a pretty little creature, smoke grey, close-haired, and singularly lissom, with small well-bred ears and speaking topaz eyes. But what took my fancy was her irrepressible, eloquently expressed joy at making the acquaintance of one worthy to understand and appreciate her.

"Madam," I said presently, when we had become the best of friends, "I must really be leaving soon. It is getting dark."

This was not true. If the sky had faded to dull crimson, faint pink, and pure lilac, the brightening moon diffused a pale mysterious radiance.

Capricious, like all cats, my little friend bounded away from me, stood for a moment rubbing herself against the paling, then dropped out of sight. I got up and walked to the edge.

Close below me a narrow broken staircase, the steps of which had almost wholly crumbled away, led down into one of those passages I have mentioned. Till now I had never realised that it was a stairway; it had looked so like the jagged end of a wall. The cat, half way down it, was looking up at me, invitation, persuasion, coaxing entreaty in every line of her slim body. "You want me to come down there?" I said, inquiringly.

As I spoke, I looked about me. In the Colosseum towards nightfall an official goes his round, and, where the arena has been excavated, skips agilely from wall to wall. This evening, however, I saw no sign of him; evidently he had come and gone. Slipping under the railing, I swung myself down to where I could find a narrow foothold. It was not a spot for lingering

on; you had either to scramble down or up again, and I scrambled down.

The passage that I had now reached was deeper and darker than it had looked, seen from a higher level, its black walls rising high above my head. My friend was trotting on in front of me, and I followed her. I did so quite without consideration, moved by a strong unreasoning impulse.

The ground began to slope slightly downwards. Close before me rose a low-browed archway. Beneath it lay a space of almost black shadow, beyond which I could distinguish a faint light. Here, then, the passage had kept its roof, to be uncovered again a little further on. It occurred to me that I might as well turn back. A caressing touch made me look down. The little grey cat was twining herself round my ankle. I stooped, but she slipped away from me. Baffled and impatient, I pursued her into the darkness.



"I TURNED AND FLED FROM THE GROWLING BEAST"

It lasted much longer than I expected; indeed, I had a puzzling, unaccountable delusion that the further I went the further the light receded. I was treading on pavement now, level and even, and trending ever downwards. On either side I could feel the massive walls hemming me in. No breath of fresher air met me; instead, my nostrils were filled with a damp, grave-like smell. And yet the idea of turning back did not again cross my mind. I was preoccupied by a curious sound, murmurous, monotonous, persistent, not unlike a gigantic, contented purr. With every forward step I took it grew in volume, until it seemed to fill my brain and stupefy it.

I had reached the light at last. It did not come from the open moonlit sky. Where did it come from? Did it filter down through some grating in the vaulting overhead? I hardly troubled to ask myself the question; there was but one question, as far as I was concerned, for which I was bound to find an answer: What was the inexplicable noise that hummed in my brain?

The passage turned abruptly. I passed the corner and stood still. The light was very dim, yet I could see that a few yards further on a dead wall rose before me, that below the wall there was a wide ledge, upon which crouched a long, dark form. And I met the unwinking stare of two great, lustrous, yellow eyes.

Slowly the light grew brighter; perhaps a little cloud drifted away from the moon.

On the ledge below the wall lay a huge smoke-grey panther watching me, and as it watched me it purred aloud. Terror froze my faculties. Yet I knew that some devilish power was urging me, driving me to go nearer to it. I clung to the wall, driving my nails into its clammy surface, struggling, fighting with every nerve and muscle of my body against that fatal impulse.

The great beast stirred slightly as if impatient. The purr had become a growl—low, sinister, menacing. I saw the broad head sink between the mighty shoulders, while the whole frame quivered. It was crouching in act to spring. The spell which held me snapped. I turned and fled.

A roar shook the earth. Once I slipped and stumbled—a hot breath was on my neck—the black walls were closing in to crush me. Now I was dashing myself against the broken edges of rough brickwork, I had found a foothold—and there my memory stops short in utter blank.

When I regained consciousness I was lying face downwards on the ground a few steps from the spot where I had sat to watch the moon rise. I was trembling from head to foot, damp with sweat, and feeling weak as a little child. All round me slept the vast shadows of the mighty amphitheatre, and far overhead the crescent moon shone serenely. Not knowing why I did so, I held my breath. Nothing stirred.

By very slow degrees memory and strength came back to me, until I dimly realised the strange thing which had befallen me. To me it had been given to go down into the heart of that crime-stained shell we call the Colosseum, and to come face to face with its very soul, incarnate by day in the form of a small grey cat, and by night in that of a panther — once perhaps the slayer of martyrs— still thirsting for human blood.

Thunder growled dully in the far distance, reverberating under deep archways and hidden passages. I rose up, still dizzy and shaken. I have wondered since how in my demoralised state I should ever have found courage to pass through the black darkness of the chief entrance, had not my ear caught the blessed sound of voices—the officials chatting just outside. Near by a solitary carriage still lingered, waiting for a chance fare. I sprang into it, and was driven off.

Need I tell you that once back in my apartment, under the influence of a good dinner and some first-rate Paradiso, I tried to laugh over the whole business —although I was placed between the unpleasant alternatives of either believing that I had suffered from a prolonged hallucination, or that I had been seized with some kind of fit. I vowed that I would re-visit the Colosseum at the same hour, forcibly abduct that cat and bring her home to my domestic hearth, and went to bed with an *amour propre* somewhat soothed by this resolution.



"I DASHED AGAINST THE BROKEN LEDGES OF ROUGH BRICKWORK."

I went to the Colosseum. I have seen it again in broad moonshine, in broad sunshine; I have seen it when its old walls stood outlined in a flare of red Bengal light. And I have met cats there—black, tabby, and thoroughly prosaic—but the little grey cat, never!

A TALE OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY:

THE ABDUCTION OF ALEXANDRA SEINE



By Fred. C. Smale.

Illustrated by R. W. Wallace.

"HEIGHO! this is gruesome work," exclaimed Bowden Snell, as he leaned back in his old Victorian chair and placed a cocaine lozenge in his mouth.

A particularly atrocious crime had been committed that morning in the suburb of Slough, and Snell, in his capacity of graphist to the *Hourly Flash*, had been sent to procure a record of it, by means of the Antegraph, then coming into general use with the news offices.

He had the advantage of possessing a good instrument, and five or six minutes had been sufficient in which to obtain good retrospective views of the crime, from the first frown of the murderer to the last dying throe of the victim.

Bowden Snell was now developing the film in his room at the *Flash* office, and the aerocar which had brought him was still outside the large bay window swinging gently to and fro at its moorings in the summer breeze.

It was now sixteen o'clock, and the pictures were needed for the seventeen o'clock edition. The murderer had been caught of course; a constable, equipped with the new collapsible wings, had swooped down on the guilty ruffian ere he had reached Windsor, whither he was making, doubtless with the intention of taking an aerocar from the rank on Castle Hill.

Bowden Snell was not young, being over fifty, and the more rapid methods of the times made it difficult for him to compete with younger men; but the *Flash* people retained him chiefly because of his extensive knowledge of the great province of London.

His films completed and despatched by tube to the lower offices, Bowden Snell mechanically pressed a button in the wall beside him, and commenced to apply himself voraciously to the resulting salmon cutlets. The apartment and its conveniences were placed entirely at his disposal by the proprietors of the *Flash*, and being a lonely man—a widower in fact—Bowden Snell made it almost his home.

He had scarcely eaten a mouthful when the room was suddenly darkened by the apparition of a second aerocar of strange old-fashioned construction, which bumped clumsily against Snell's own machine, and ultimately drew up at the window.

Immediately a young man, clad in white from head to foot, leaped into the room. His face was brown with exposure to the sun, and he looked anxious and travel-worn.

"Arbuthnot!" exclaimed Bowden Snell, "you here? What on earth——?"

"Ah, how familiar it sounds to hear one of your dear old-fashioned sayings, Mr. Snell," said the new-comer. "On earth indeed! when I haven't touched earth for sixteen hours. Do give me a bite of something, for Heaven's sake; I'm famishing," and the young man looked longingly at the salmon cutlets.

Still bewildered, the other turned to the wall and hurriedly pressed a number of buttons.

"Steady, I say; steady," said the young man, with a faint smile. "Roast turkey, cold salad, mushrooms, fried soles, Burgundy—a bit of a mixture, eh?"

Somewhat confused, the elder man checked himself and turned from the buttons.

"But how is it you are here?" he asked. "I thought you were in Japan, helping to develop that part of the empire."

"I must talk and eat at the same time," replied Arbuthnot. "Potatoes, stuffing, and green peas, if you don't mind—thanks. Mr. Snell, I am in great trouble."



"A YOUNG MAN SPRANG INTO THE ROOM, LEAVING HIS AEROCAR OUTSIDE."

"Hum, it hasn't affected your appetite, at any rate," said the other.

"Perhaps not; but I can tell you the air of the Ghauts is pretty keen, at least I found it so this morning as I came through."

"Well, don't hurry yourself; I'll go on with my own luncheon," said Snell, re-seating himself.

"All right," replied Arbuthnot, with his mouth full, "I won't waste more time than I can help. Listen: I took to Japan with me two telepathic instruments."

"Ah, a lady's whim, eh?" suggested Bowden Snell.

"Something of my own idea as well," replied the young man, a slight flush over-spreading his handsome face. "You see, one couldn't be running home here to England every few weeks, and Ally and I thought it would be nice to sit and talk to each other sometimes, even though thousands of miles of clouds floated between us."

Bowden Snell nodded indulgently; and Arbuthnot, leaning back with a sigh, lit a cigarette—he was a steady young man, and abstained from drugs.

"Now this morning a strange thing happened," he continued. "You must understand I have one instrument upstairs and the other down in my sitting-room; it isn't always so easy to hit the mark in Japan, you know, owing to the earthquakes, so that when Ally missed one with a message the chances were that she would hit the other."

"I see."

"Well, I was sitting down having a smoke after the day's work—of course it was evening there—when the signal of the instrument clicked, and I instantly placed my ear to it. Then I heard my dar—Ally's voice, I mean, seemingly in great distress, calling me, saying, 'Help, help, Jack! I am being carried away,' and then there was a dead silence."

The young man paused, and passed a trembling hand across his damp brow. He went on—

"I rushed upstairs to the other instru-



"THEY ROSE OVER THE DOME OF ST. PAUL'S AND SPED AWAY IN AN EASTERLY DIRECTION."

ment, thinking that possibly it might be catching what the other missed, but I heard nothing more, though I shouted continually."

"Shouting's never any good; only rattles the mechanism," said Bowden Snell. "Of course you took the direction?"

"Yes, I thought of that," replied Arbuthnot. "It was due west, and two degrees from normal."

"Two degrees from normal, eh!" repeated the other, musingly. Then he took a scrap of paper from his pocket and made a few rapid calculations, at the end of which he exclaimed—

"Hullo, she must have been in the air then."

"Of course," answered the young man, "that is how I worked it out: three hundred feet from the ground, and fifty miles south of Greenwich."

"About that," concurred Bowden Snell. "Well, what are you going to do, and what do you want of me?"

"I thought of you immediately," said Arbuthnot, "and, placing a few food-pellets in my pocket, I jumped on my machine and came away just as I was. Luckily my aerocar, which

is, as you see, one of the old-fashioned ones — I can't afford a new one — was charged, and I can tell you I made her rattle coming along over Thibet, Russia, and Germany. Once I caught up the daylight, yet it took me sixteen hours to do the journey," he concluded, apologetically.

Bowden Snell smiled grimly. He thought of the old days of his boyhood, when a voyage from Japan was considered a very serious undertaking, occupying weeks of wearisome crawling over land and water.

"And now," cried the young man, jumping up from his chair, "I have come to you, my father's old friend, to ask you to help me. You know this great province of London as well as any man, and, moreover, your particular occupation gives you immense facilities for discovering what I want to know."

"And that is?"

"I want to find Ally," said Arbuthnot. "I am to blame for wasting time as I have, but I was really famishing."

"What is she like, to begin with?" asked Bowden Snell.

"Oh, I forgot; you have never seen her, have you?" replied the young man. "Look," and taking a small case from his breast-pocket he handed it to Snell, who said as he took it—

"I was in Canada the afternoon you brought her to my house remember, so that, as you say, I never have seen her." He then applied his eye to an aperture in the case, and pressed a knob. Instantly a faint ticking sound was heard, and the holder started violently. "Young man, who is this girl? What is her name?" he asked agitatedly as he returned the case.

"Do you know her?" said Arbuthnot in surprise at the effect the vitograph had produced on his companion. "Her name is Seine; at least—" and the young man hesitated a moment—"that is the name she goes by—Alexandra Seine. To tell you the truth, her real name is not known. She was discovered in Paris when we entered the city in '30. Of course, she was only a tiny child then, and as no clue to her identity could be found, they christened her Alexandra, after the then Dowager Empress, and Seine after the river on the banks of which she was found. An English lady adopted her, and that's all her history."

Bowden Snell had been sitting with his face buried in his hands whilst the young man had been speaking.

"Paris!—1930!—my little Violet—can it be?" he cried disjointly; "the very same smile—her very movements!"

"Your daughter!" exclaimed Arbuthnot in amazement, momentarily forgetting the urgency of his errand.

"Yes, yes. Come here a moment," and the elder man led him to the far end of the apartment, which was curtained off, and there facing a blank white wall stood, on a pedestal, a box-shaped machine somewhat resembling the old magic-lanterns pictured in the books of our boyhood. It was evidently fixed there for film-testing purposes.

Snell drew the curtains after them, and they stood almost in darkness. Carefully taking a small square sheet of gelatinous substance from his pocket-book, he inserted it in the instrument and pressed a knob at the side. Instantly a bluish flame kindled within, and on the blank wall appeared the life-sized figure of a pretty woman dressed in the late Victorian style—large sleeves, curled hair, skirts reaching to the ankles and all. She smiled bewitchingly, yet with a slight touch of sadness, and held out her arms towards the mute observers, her lips moving at the same time; then she seemed to step forward, and the vision faded.

"My Ally to the life!" exclaimed Arbuthnot; "but how did you get her graphilm? And in that queer costume! Was it a masquerade?"

"That was not 'Ally,' as you call her," replied Bowden Snell; "it was her mother, and my dear dead wife. If I could have inserted her voice-record at the same time, I have no doubt it would have been a further proof, but the cylinder is at home."

"Your wife!" cried Arbuthnot. "Can it be?"

"I served with the City Imperial Volunteers at the Siege of Paris in '30," replied Bowden Snell as he carefully replaced the film in his book. "My wife and child were in Paris when the war broke out. My wife was killed by a chance shell; our babe, it seems, escaped." Then, subduing his emotion with an effort, he seized Arbuthnot by the arm and exclaimed, "Come, come, let us find her; don't ask questions now, let us away!"

"Yes," said Arbuthnot, "but whither? We have no clue."

"Let me think, let me think," said Snell,

passing his hand over his forehead; then, stepping quickly across the room, he pressed a knob in the wall, causing a little shutter to fall.

"What place?" asked a faint voice.

"Give me the whole of East London, from Greenwich to St. Paul's," replied Bowden Snell, "in sections of square miles."

"It's rather dark," said the voice, grumblingly, "but I'll try."

"Come, Arbuthnot, you had better look as well," said Snell, motioning the young man to his side.

The two men applied their eyes to circular orifices in the wall, and waited.

"Do you see anything?" asked Arbuthnot, presently.

"Nothing," replied the other, "only the usual crowd of aerocars above and athletes walking in the streets below. It is almost too dark to discern faces. I can see no car that is suspicious. Stay! Ah, no!—only some air-sailors drinking absinthe."

"What is to be done?" exclaimed Arbuthnot, despairingly.

"You there?" called Snell.

"Yes," came the voice in reply.

"Give me a line due east of Greenwich straight away to the sea."

"Apparatus only reaches Swanley; line broken down," came the reply.

"What a nuisance! When will they perfect these things?" said Arbuthnot, impatiently.

"Give me as far as you can then," cried Snell.

"Right."

"Now then, keep your eyes open," warned the elder man.

"Look!" Arbuthnot



"HE SHOUTED LUSTILY TO TRAVERS IN HIS CAR THE 'MINUTE GUN.'"

cried suddenly, "there she is!" and then Snell clicked a switch on his left.

"I've checked it," he said, in tones of suppressed excitement. "You are sure it is she?"

"Quite," said Arbuthnot, agitatedly; "but who is the man with her? I cannot see."



"HE PICKED UP SOME BALL-SHAPED OBJECT AND HURLED IT AT HIS INTERRUPTERS."

"Great Heavens! 'Eagle Malvowley; I might have guessed it, the fiend!" cried Bowden Snell.

"Malvowley! What, he that owns the secret castle in the Balkans?" queried Arbuthnot, breathlessly.

"The same," answered Bowden Snell; "he is bearing her thither, the villain. But where are they? We must follow at once."

"I cannot understand," said Arbuthnot, straining his eyes at the aperture, "there is open sea beneath, and yet the operator said——"

"You there?" came the voice.

"Well?" said Snell, quickly.

"The instrument is a little out of order. By mistake I started you from the French end; you have checked it in mid-channel."

"That is all right, thank you," said Snell. "That explains it," he said, turning to his companion; "but let us watch. How is this—they seem stationary?"

"They are stationary," cried Arbuthnot, after a moment. "Come, let us away."

Bowden Snell turned off the knob and followed the younger man to the window.

"My machine," he said briefly, "it is the swifter."

Arbuthnot leaped in, and Bowden Snell followed him.

With a whiz and a flutter they rose through the cool evening air and, after soaring undecidedly over the ancient dome of St. Paul's, sped away in an easterly direction.

The air was fairly full of business cars, which rose in shoals from the heart of the province and dropped in various suburbs about Essex, Suffolk, and Kent.

Once away from the great centre, however, our travellers were able to put on full speed, and in a few minutes the silvery gleam of the Channel appeared in sight.

They searched the air with strained eyes as they sped along; but, beyond the usual Continental and Far East cars, they saw nothing of consequence.

As they neared the sea they decided to descend, and dropped lightly at the very water's edge, on a secluded beach between Dover and Folkestone. They stepped out on the yielding sand, and stood by the rippling waves.

A huge full moon was just appearing above the horizon, and its pale beauty was reflected in touches of silver on the darkening sea. Far above them a few aerocars wafted their way towards their various destinations, and the alert customs officers in their crimson-painted machines flitted restlessly hither and thither.

The two men stood silent for a few moments, awed by the beauty and solitude of the scene.

"We are beaten," bitterly exclaimed Arbuthnot at last.

"Wait," said Bowden Snell as he narrowly scanned an approaching car; "if I am not greatly mistaken that is Jim Travers of the *Minute Gun*. It looks like his machine; yes, it is. Above there, Travers!" he shouted lustily.

"Hello, Snell!" came the reply, "what's amiss?" and the car swooped gracefully to within a few yards of their heads, Travers looking over the side at his fellow graphist.

"Have you seen 'Eagle Malvowley in your travels?" asked Snell.

"Just passed him about half way across," was the welcome answer; "he had had a breakdown—jammed lever, I fancy—and is fluttering about like a wounded gull."

"Anyone with him?" shouted Arbuthnot, as with Snell he stepped hastily aboard their machine.

"Couldn't see; too dark," replied Travers, as he resumed his progress Londonwards. "Anything special on?" he called back. "If so, telepath us at the office, there's a good fellow."

But, with a shout of thanks, Bowden Snell and Arbuthnot were already soaring over the sea.

"He's just back from Baden Races—lucky I saw him," muttered the former, as he pulled out all the speed-bars.

Arbuthnot was in a state of fierce



"THE BOMB FELL BACK ON MALVOWLEY'S OWN CAR, SCATTERING THE MACHINE INTO A MILLION FRAGMENTS."

excitement; he peered anxiously forward, and at length his bloodshot eyes detected a fluttering object between himself and the full-orbed moon.

Mutely he grasped Snell's arm and pointed.

"I see," said the other, laconically; and with a skilfully executed upward swoop he guided the machine to within a dozen yards of the apparently uncontrollable fugitive car, in which a tall, slight man with a dark, saturnine countenance was uttering vicious oaths, and spitefully hammering at some part of the machinery.

Arbuthnot jumped recklessly on to the high platform of their car, and with a gasp of mingled fear and relief beheld the beloved object of his search lying on the bottom of the other machine, to all appearance lifeless.

Malvowley was so engrossed in his task that he had not noticed the approach of his pursuers, but a fierce hail from Arbuthnot caused him to leap up.

With an execration he picked up some ball-shaped object and hurled it at his interrupters, but in his sudden surprise he missed his aim.

Bowden Snell hastily seized a lever and drew it back with a jerk. The car rose vertically some fifty feet above Malvowley's.

"Rippite bomb," said Snell, with a white face, as the missile struck the water below and burst with the soft seductive whirr of that deadly explosive.

"You are helpless, Malvowley," cried Arbuthnot. "Hand over Miss Seine at once."

"Come and take her," yelled Malvowley, defiantly; "I won't miss you a second time," and he seemed to apply himself again to the task of repairing his gear.

"We must board him," said Snell; "it is our only chance. If he once gets his machine in hand again he will be the other side of Europe in five minutes. She's a racer, built for the America Cup Race of last year. I will swoop close to him, and you must leap for it."

"I'll try it," said Arbuthnot, desperately. "If I miss, you must descend on the chance of picking me up."

"Now, then!" cried Snell, as they swept down.

With a fast-beating heart Arbuthnot hurled himself into the car, knocking the surprised Malvowley into a corner, where he lay momentarily stunned.

With lightning movements the young man seized the unconscious girl in his arms and passed her over to Bowden Snell, who, pale as death, stood ready to receive her. Arbuthnot had scarcely time to leap back after when Malvowley recovered himself, and, with horrible oaths, rushed to the side of his car.

"Curse you!" he shrieked, "I'll wreck you; I'll send you all to eternity!"

"Up—up—quick!" shouted Arbuthnot, "another bomb!"

They rose with sickening speed, and Malvowley, foaming with demoniacal rage, hurled another deadly missile up after them, putting all his strength into the attempt.

They were too quick, however, and the bomb fell back again on Malvowley's own car, exploding on the contact, and scattering the machine and its unhappy occupant into a million fragments.

Some of the wreckage struck the victors as they still soared upwards, but they were rising too rapidly to suffer any injury. When at last, pale and trembling, they found courage to look down, only a few pieces of floating wood and aluminium far below remained as witnesses of 'Eagle Malvowley's fearful end. To their great joy, Snell and Arbuthnot discovered that the rescued girl had merely fainted, and in a short time the keen upper air revived her.

It appeared that Malvowley had swooped unexpectedly down upon her as she was walking on a lonely road near Reading, and despite her cries had carried her off. She had retained presence of mind enough to note the sun's position and rapidly make the mental calculation necessary in order to obtain her lover's exact direction; she then telepathed, but ere many thoughts had left her brain, her captor had suspected something, and brutally flung her into the bottom of the car.

Having telepathed to allay the natural anxiety of her guardian at Reading, they sped back to Snell's private house at Bexley. The happy girl smilingly caressed her lover's hand, and leaning her head against her newly-found father's shoulder, said brightly—

"Rescued maiden; long-lost daughter. It seems like one of the old-fashioned novels, doesn't it?"

"Romance is never old-fashioned, my dear; it is for all time," said Bowden Snell.

THE CLOSED DOOR.

THE MYSTERY OF WYLDERNESS MANOR.

By J. Douglas Holms.

Illustrated by Phil Green.

THAT our lives are controlled by Fate is denied by many. Perhaps so, perhaps not. I cannot say. But this much I do know, that had I some few years ago not stopped at a print shop in Piccadilly and glanced at the engravings in the windows, there can be no doubt that I should have been spared one of the most terrible episodes of my life.

That I did stop and look at these engravings is a fact. That Fate ordained that I should do so is—well, an unpleasant hypothesis, the truth of which I am well content to leave unproved.

One engraving in particular attracted my attention—that of an old house almost entirely covered with ivy, and, if one might infer from the quaint peaked gables and the small latticed windows, evidently of considerable antiquity. There was an air of mystery about the house, standing as it did amidst surroundings neglected and uncared for, and encircled by a deep moat over which an old-fashioned drawbridge gave access to a massive door, apparently the principal entrance to the dwelling.

Acting on a sudden impulse, I entered



"'WHO ARE ALL THESE?' I SAID, POINTING AT THE PORTRAITS."

the shop and asked the proprietor if he could give me any information as to the original—if original there were—of the engraving. Curiously enough he was able to do so. The house was situated a mile or two from the village of ——, in Hertfordshire, bore the name of Wylderness Manor, and was the property of Sir Geoffrey ——.

I there and then made up my mind to run down to ——, and see the place itself.

On the following day I did so. I returned to town delighted with the result of my journey. The house was all that the engraving had represented it to be. Better still, the landlord of the little village inn had volunteered the information that it had stood empty for some years, and that the owner wished to let it, together with about a thousand acres of land on which fair sport might be obtained.

"Why has it stood empty so long?" I asked. "Is anything wrong with the house?"

"No, but Sir Geoffrey hasn't troubled much to find a tenant, and never comes to the house himself, as he has another and much finer place in Yorkshire."

The answer seemed satisfactory.

The place was just what I wanted, not too large, yet with plenty of accommodation should I wish to ask a few friends to shoot. It was also near town, and convenient to run down to from Fridays till Mondays in summer.

A few days later I called on the agent, and finally left his office the master of Wylderness Manor for the next five years, at what seemed to me a very low rent for so beautiful and conveniently situated a place.

Towards the end of September, about a week before the expected arrival of two or three men whom I had asked to shoot over the covers, I found myself settled down in my new quarters.

After dinner I strolled into the library and began to examine the family portraits with which the walls were hung. Speculating as to the probable relation which one might have to another, I was suddenly apprised by an apologetic cough that there was someone in the room besides myself. I turned round. An old woman with pure white hair, dressed in an antique fashion, stood by the door. I recognised her in an instant as the housekeeper who had shown me over the house on the occasion of my first visit. Also I remembered that I had engaged her to remain on in that capacity when I should take possession. She apologised for intruding, but she wished to know if I found everything comfortable. I assured her everything was quite satisfactory.

"Who are all these?" I asked, pointing at the portraits.

The old woman came further into the room, nothing loth to begin the recountal.

Handsome men, ugly men, women dark and fair, but, as I noticed, nearly all good-looking, she described them in detail, till the repetition of Sir Charles, Sir John, Sir Richard, became rather wearisome, and the recountal of the beauty and virtues of the dames scarcely less so. At last we paused before the portrait of a young woman of extreme beauty.

"Who was she?" I inquired.

The old woman shook her white head mournfully.

"You are not the first as has asked me that, sir," she said. "Perhaps 'tis because she's the prettiest of them all. Well, well, beauty, sir, as they say, is only skin deep. If she was the prettiest she was also the worst of the women of this house."

Was I mistaken, or did I, as the old woman uttered the words, hear a sound that seemed half sob, half moan?

I listened again. I heard nothing but the sough of the wind as it swept through the branches of the great trees outside. What a strange fancy! Yet I had certainly thought I heard something different from the moaning of the wind.

I turned once more to listen to the old housekeeper, who was going on with her description as though *she*, at all events, had heard nothing.

"Poor young thing, poor child; no doubt she did wrong; yet they do say that her husband"—she pointed to the portrait of a dark, handsome man—"was hard and cruel to her. But whatever he did to her, she had no right to run away from him and bring disgrace on an old and honoured name."

Again, and surely not fancy this time, I heard that curious moaning sob, so clearly that I could not be mistaken.

"What was that? Did you hear it?" I asked hurriedly.

"What, sir?"

"That cry! Didn't you hear it?"

The old woman smiled. "Cry, sir? No, 'tis but the wind. Sure 'tis a rough night."

Yes, she was right. It must have been the wind; nevertheless I felt depressed in

the presence of the portraits of those who, years and years ago, had lived out their lives much as we live out ours, and who were now, without one solitary exception, all folded in the last and most terrible of all sleeps. So, bidding the housekeeper a rather unceremonious good night, I went upstairs to my bedroom.

Poking the fire into a cheerful blaze, I lit my pipe and threw myself into one of the large easy chairs standing on either side of the fireplace.

Somehow I felt restless and unsettled. As I sat looking into the glowing embers, the face of the child-wife whose sad history I had just listened to kept rising up before me. So young, so innocent-looking! Surely she could not have been as bad as was said!

I began in my own mind to weave a romance of a cruel husband, a much-oppressed wife, and a lover in all respects different from the husband; and I began to make excuses for the frailty of that young creature in running away from such a tyrant as I was by that time quite certain her husband must have been. Then I woke up to the conviction that I was taking a somewhat sentimental interest in people with whom and whose doings I was not, or need not to be, in any way concerned; also to the realisation that I was growing sleepy, and had better go to bed.

That night I dreamed a dream.

In my dream I found myself in a room which I knew I had never seen before. In that room I saw stretched on the floor the body of a woman, from a wound in whose breast blood was flowing and forming a ghastly pool on the uncarpeted floor. Bending over her was a man. The cold, clear light of the moon, striking through the window, fell on his face.

Even in sleep I recognised that face. It was that of the man who had been pointed out to me as the dishonoured husband of a faithless wife. I saw him raise the fallen head of his victim. I looked at her face and I saw—the face of the wanton wife for whom, for the sake of her young, bright beauty, I had felt pity and striven to make palliation.



"ON THE FLOOR LAY THE BODY OF A WOMAN. BENDING OVER HER WAS A MAN WITH A DAGGER IN HIS HAND."

Then, in my dream, I witnessed the last act in that ghastly tragedy. I have no words to describe it: silence is best.

With a shudder of terror, I awoke.

The warm rays of sunshine were playing on my bed. It was morning.

Rising, I dressed hurriedly, and went down to the dining-room.

It was, of course, ridiculous; but so

affected was I by the events of the preceding night, that my attempt at a breakfast was a miserable failure. I could only marvel



"I TRIED TO OPEN THE DOOR, BUT IT WAS FAST CLOSED."

at my own weakness in being thus shaken by what was, after all, only a dream. True, only a dream; but what a dream!

As the day wore on I became more myself again, and what with the interest of viewing my new domain, and arranging with the keeper as to the plan of campaign for the 1st, I all but forgot the horrifying vision that had so strangely unnerved me, and returned home fully prepared to make amends at lunch for my shortcomings at breakfast.

Luncheon over, I went to the smoking-room, where, tired out with my morning tramp, I fell fast asleep.

If what had happened to me in a dream was horrifying, how much more dreadful the reality of my waking in that smoking-room!

Opening my eyes on the fast darkening room, I had just realised that I must have been asleep for some time, when I heard a slight noise, as though the handle of the door was being turned. Then the door slowly opened, and footsteps—*footsteps, but no visible being*—crossed the room, paused for an instant beside me, then went as they came. The door closed noiselessly behind them!

Rigid with horror, I remained seated. Suddenly a spasm of apprehension seized me. Once more the door opened, but this time to admit nothing more terrifying than the old housekeeper. I suppose she must have read the horror in my face.

"Whatever is it, sir?" she cried. Then a paler shade crept over her already white face. "He has heard them," she said, in an undertone; "they come to everyone who dwells in this accursed house!"

As she spoke, and just as I was about to ask the meaning of her words, I heard light, firm footsteps swiftly descend the stairs, cross the hall, pass over the threshold of the open doorway, and come straight towards us.

By a strong effort of will I contrived to speak.

"Do you hear, Mrs. Matthews? Do you hear these footsteps?"

"Ay, sir," she answered, without a tremble in her voice. "I hear them. I have heard them this many a day."

As we spoke the footsteps moved again towards the door. A sudden impulse seized me. I would follow and see where these footsteps went.

So swiftly moved the unseen feet, that I had to run across the hall, up the staircase, through a long corridor, then up a narrow corkscrew stairway leading to the top of the house, till finally the footsteps seemed to pass through a door which interposed an effectual barrier to my further progress. I tried the door, but it was fast closed. No effort of mine could open it.

I went down again to the smoking-room. The housekeeper was standing just where I had left her.

Of information regarding the mysterious footsteps she could give me little, save that—I quote her words—"To all who ever live in this house they come sooner or later. To you they have come sooner than I have ever before known them; it was not till he had lived here for many a day that they came to Sir Geoffrey. Then he left the house, and has never come near it since."

The door by which I had been stopped was, she told me, the entrance to a room in which lumber of all descriptions was stored. Into that room I determined I would go. But the door must first be broken open. To do this the services of a locksmith were necessary. Nothing could be done that night.

Early the following morning I got the village locksmith to come to the manor. He looked not a little astonished when I led him to the door and bade him force it open. That was quickly done (more quickly than legally I have sometimes since thought), and on entering we found ourselves confronted with piles of boxes and lumber that it would take a considerable time to remove. Determined, however, that this must be done, I got some of the men from the stables, and set them to work.

It was just midday when they finished and sent word to me that all was ready.

Then I went upstairs, and, passing through the little knot of men standing round the door, entered the room.

The light of the outer world struggled feebly through the dust with which the window panes were thickly coated. For a little time I could scarcely see anything. Then I began to make out the conformation of the room.

As I mechanically noticed the position of the mantelpiece, and the quaint oriel window that directly fronted the doorway, a curious sense of familiarity with my surroundings came over me.

"Was it—could it be? Yes, it was!"

With a sickening thrill of horror it was borne in upon me that I had in a dream seen that ghastly tragedy played out in that very room! Instinctively I looked at the floor. Covered though it was with the dust of years, I clearly saw a dark stain on the oaken boards upon the very spot where in that dream I had seen the murdered woman lying.

All in a moment explained itself to me. A murder had in truth been committed in this room. That murder had been revealed to me in a vision.



"I LOOKED UP THE CHIMNEY, BUT IMPENETRABLE DARKNESS MET MY GAZE."

Suddenly the termination of my dream

flashed on me. I stepped hastily across the room to the huge fireplace, and looked up the chimney, at the top of which, if there was no obstruction, I should see the sky overhead. It was as I had expected. Nothing but impenetrable darkness met my gaze!

What need to go into detail as to how we got the ghastly thing down. Suffice it to say that in the chimney, stuck fast midway, we found a leather sack, the contents of which when thrown on the floor emitted a rattling sound, the meaning of which I alone comprehended.

In the middle of that gloomy chamber, with the as yet unopened sack lying at our feet, I told the horror-stricken men of my dream and of the ghostly footsteps of the previous day. Then we opened the sack, and found but a few whitened bones as all that was mortal of the woman who, radiant and beautiful, had been accounted among the fairest of her day and generation.

Guilty she may have been, but not as was said, for thus, years after her death, it has been proved that she did not leave her home and husband, but fell by her husband's hand, urged thereto by madness and jealousy.

And lest some sceptic should say, "How do you know that these bones did not belong to someone else?" I would add that we found a ring in the sack which in massiveness and quaintness of design and setting is the very facsimile of the ring which flashes on the finger of the Lady Gwendoline as she is depicted in her portrait.

In conclusion, I would say that I believe my dream to have been something more than a dream—to have been, in fact, a revelation from the dead to the living. I advance this theory because I feel certain that the footsteps came to me thus quickly because the spirit of the murdered woman knew that I felt pity and compassion for her mournful story, and was willing that I should know that the stories of the living wronged the dead.

My story is finished. It is, perhaps, needless to say that I put off my guests and left Wylderness Manor never to return.

And I would that as easily as I left behind me its ivy-clad walls, I could leave behind me the memory of the ghastly vision that I there beheld, and of the dreadful reality that I there discovered.

A CRUMPET WHICH WENT THROUGH THE POST AS A CHRISTMAS CARD.

HERE is a photograph of a crumpet which was actually stamped and sent through the post to an address at Yarmouth. It bore a halfpenny stamp and received no injury in transit. The gentleman who sent it was so pleased with his success that he tried to send another, but this time the Post Office caught him and sent it back marked "Contrary to regulations."

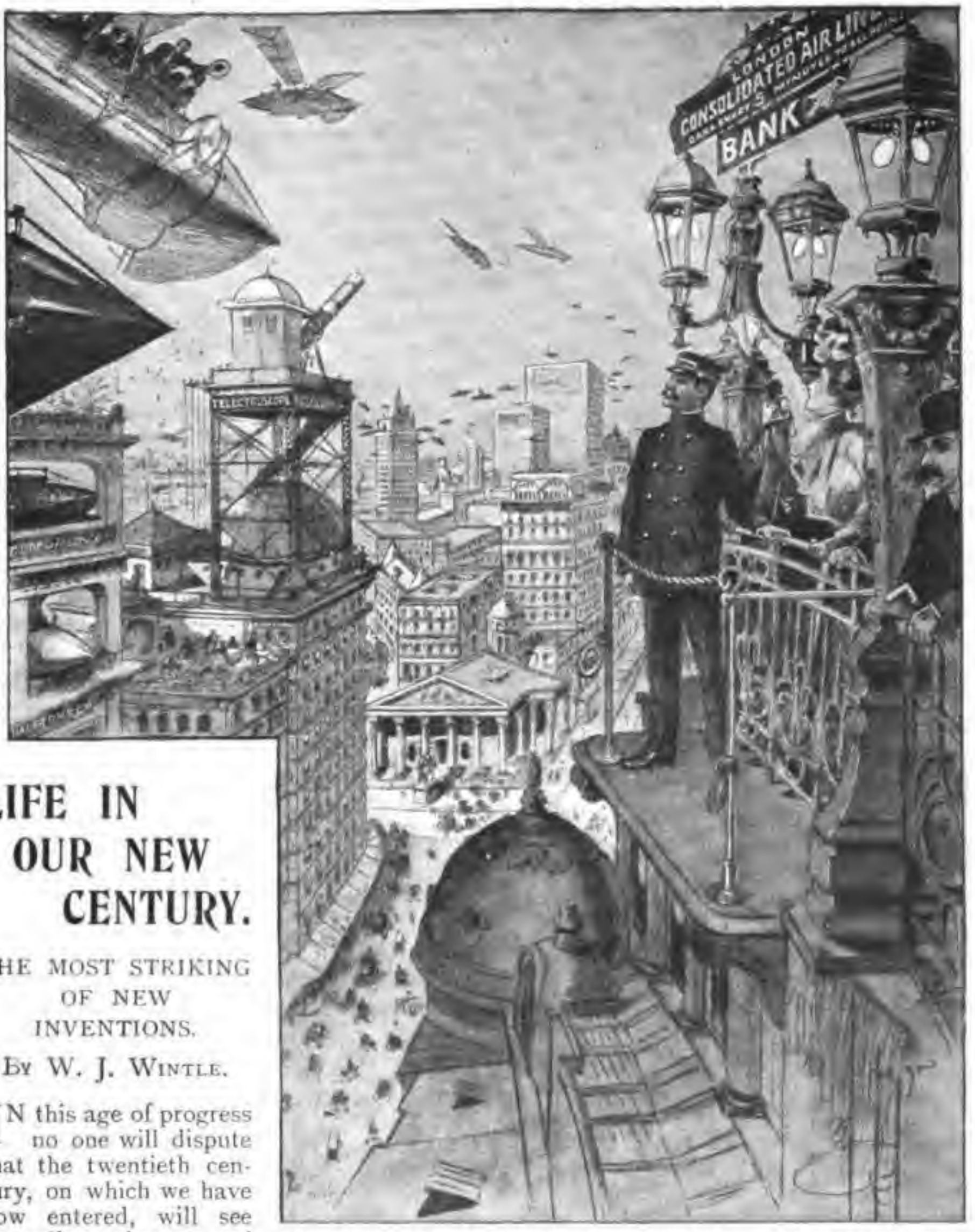


LIFE IN OUR NEW CENTURY.

THE MOST STRIKING OF NEW INVENTIONS.

By W. J. Wintle.

IN this age of progress no one will dispute that the twentieth century, on which we have now entered, will see marvellous advances and improvements on every hand.



THE COMING OF THE AIRSHIP WILL NECESSITATE ROOF STATIONS. THIS IS OUR ARTIST'S SUGGESTION FOR ONE AT THE MANSION HOUSE CORNER, LONDON.

To try to peep into the future is the work of the seer or the prophet, and we make no claim to be either the one or the other. But there are certain tendencies of modern progress and discovery which will become translated into actual facts within a very few years, and it needs no prophet to forecast what these will be.

In the present article we shall indulge in no imaginative speculation, but shall restrict ourselves to the task of recording various wonders that have already been accomplished in the laboratory, and that only await further development and testing to be introduced to the world.

The man of the twentieth century will



THE FLYING MACHINE OF THE FUTURE WILL PROBABLY BE BASED UPON THE STRUCTURE OF A FLYING BIRD, THE LOUVRES IN THE WINGS CORRESPONDING TO THE ACTION OF THE BIRD'S FEATHERS.

no longer confine his travels to land and sea—he will navigate the air as well. It is beyond question that the flying-machine will soon become a practical reality.

Already the experiments of Count Zeppelin and others have proved that a balloon can be navigated and can be propelled against the wind. The trial voyages of balloonists from Paris last October marked an epoch in the history of aerial navigation. The aeronaut is no longer at the mercy of every passing gust of wind.

Travelling by a steering-balloon, however, has its limitations. It is obvious that the voyager is dependent upon his supply of gas holding out, and experience has shown that with every precaution a very serious leakage takes place. The flying-machine of the future will need to be to a large extent independent of contained gas.

Experiments in this direction have been made by several inventors, but it was Mr. Hiram S. Maxim, whose name is so well known in connection with the Maxim gun, who first succeeded in making a machine that would actually raise itself from the ground and fly.

Everyone knows that a kite, or, indeed, any light article presenting a large horizontal surface, such as a piece of cardboard, can be supported by the wind if it can only be kept facing it. This is the principle of the aeroplane flying-machine, designed by Mr. Maxim, in which 4,000 square feet of lifting surface were presented to the wind.

A small engine of high power but light weight drove the propellers, and the whole affair, including three passengers, weighed almost 8,000 lbs. Experiments proved that

when this machine was driven along rails at a good speed it rose from the ground and exhibited a lifting power of 10,000 lbs. It was not tested at full speed, or it would doubtless have been seen to possess a still greater lifting power.

There can be little doubt that the successful flying-machine will be constructed on the principle of the flying bird. After all, nature has shown us how to fly, and it only remains for us to copy her methods. Our artist has drawn a machine on these lines, the louvres in the wings being designed to act in much the same way as the large feathers of a bird. We present this idea gratis to the capitalist in search of some pleasant way of getting rid of a little superfluous cash!

On land, also, the twentieth century will see great advances in the way of locomotion. It is now an established fact that a suitably designed electric car can be safely run at a speed of 120 miles an hour on the monorail system, and such a line will shortly be constructed in England. At present it does not appear possible to go any faster than this with safety, but, no doubt, greater things will be achieved in the future.

The motor car is already a familiar sight, and there can be no question that, before the century is far advanced, automobiles will be the usual, rather than the exceptional, vehicles seen in our streets. But there is no reason to suppose that they will altogether supersede the horse, nor is that useful quadruped likely to be relegated to a paddock in the Zoological Gardens.

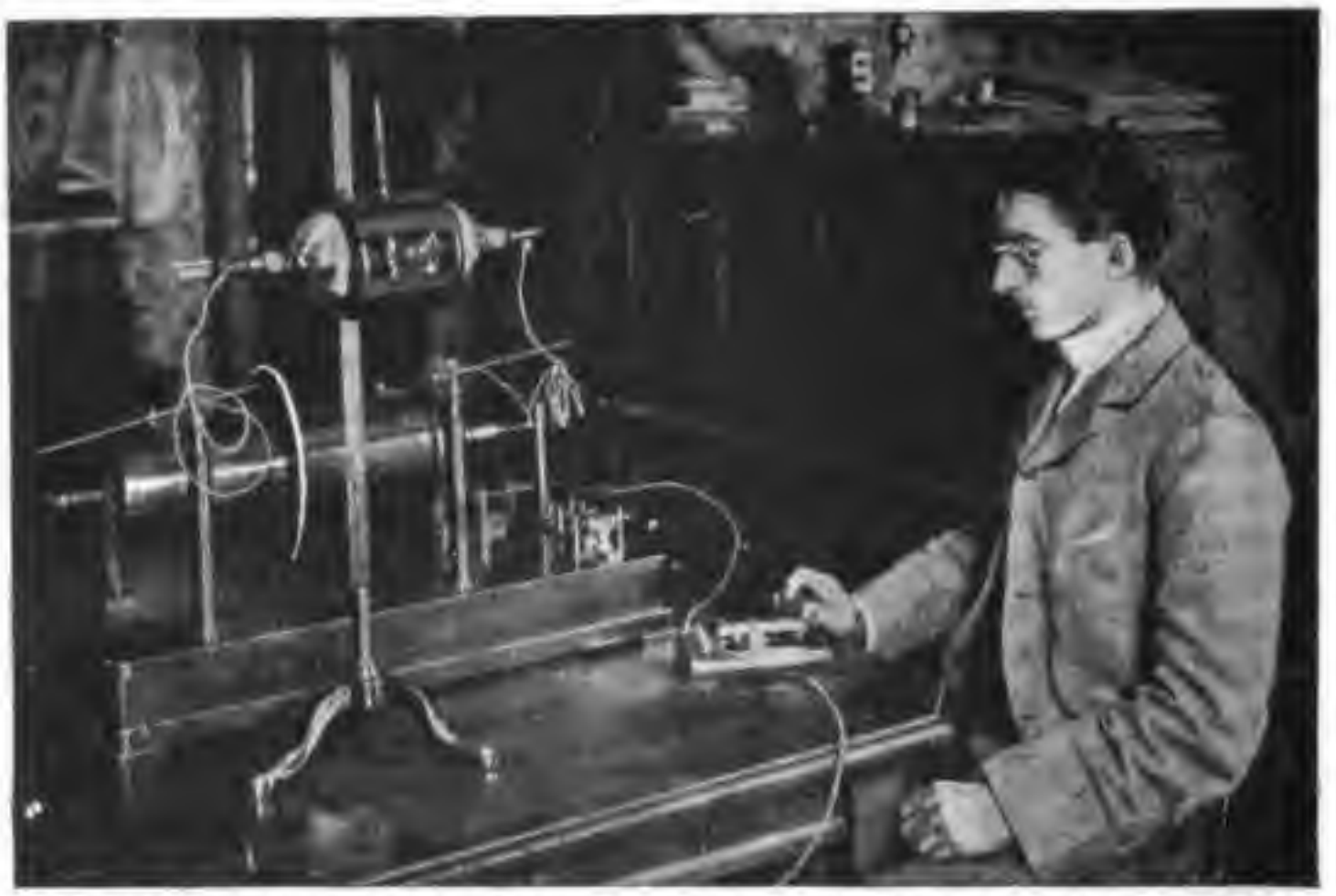
The ocean greyhound of the present day will be quite eclipsed by the rapid ships of the future. The latest step in advance is seen in the adoption of the turbine propeller for steamship purposes. Quite a sensation has been caused in nautical circles by the performances of H.M.S. *Viper*, which travels at the rate of forty-three miles an hour. This extraordinary speed has been obtained by fitting her with steam turbines (page 538).

Up to the present no passenger ship has been fitted on this principle, but such an ocean liner has been designed, and it is contemplated to fit some of the future Channel packets with turbines.

There seems to be no reason



BY MEANS OF THE TELECTROSCOPE WE SHALL NOT ONLY BE ABLE TO LISTEN TO THE DISTANT ORATOR BUT SHALL WATCH HIS ACTIONS AS WELL.



THE CLERK IN THE OFFICE PRESSES THE BUTTON, AND BY MEANS OF POCKET TELEGRAPHY—

why in ten years' time we should not be crossing the Atlantic at a pace of forty miles an hour, or even more.

The new method not only vastly increases the speed but reduces the size and weight of the engines, practically annihilates vibration, and economises fuel.

The last point is one of vital importance, for the fastest liners of the present day carry 2,500 tons of coal for a trip across the Atlantic. A greater speed would mean more coal, and this would increase the size of the vessel to an impracticable extent. Probably the twentieth century will see liquid air used in marine engines instead of steam, and then this difficulty will be overcome.

We have already indicated electricity as the great power of the future, and it is from this source that the greatest wonders may be expected. The discovery of the Hertzian waves—which are really a kind of invisible light—and the transmission of telegraphic messages without wires have marked an enormous stride in advance.

Mr. A. Rosenberg, one of the most brilliant electricians of the day, has invented a system of pocket telegraphy, by means of which a man may carry his own apparatus in his pocket and receive messages even from people who do not know where he is.

The inventor takes his small receiver with him when he goes out to lunch, and places it beside him on the restaurant table. If his clerks need him they simply depress a key connected with the transmitter in the office, and the bell of the receiver in the restaurant at once rings.

This can be done in open country over a space of six miles, but in a town, with so much metal and waste electricity about, the range is much more limited.

The illustration below, taken from a photograph, shows Mr. Rosenberg in his private residence, actually receiving a message from his clerks at the office.

This inventor has also made it possible to watch a scene at a distance of hundreds



MR. ROSENBERG, THE INVENTOR OF THE SYSTEM, RECEIVES THE MESSAGE IN HIS PRIVATE HOUSE.

of miles. By the use of the electroscope it will be possible for busy men, who cannot attend the races, to simply call at the nearest theatre at the right time and witness the race being run, as here shown.

The same contrivance can be adapted to private use, and the invalid confined to his room will be able not only to enjoy the scenery of the mountains and sea, but also to witness a review at Aldershot, or anything else that may be happening.

Not only can we in London hear our friends talking in Paris by means of the telephone, but the telautograph has now made it possible



THE ELECTROSCOPE WILL BE CONNECTED WITH THE LONDON THEATRES, WHICH WILL ENABLE US TO WATCH THE RACES WHILE THEY ARE BEING RUN—THE THEATRES BEING SPECIALLY OPENED FOR THAT PURPOSE.

to transmit autograph handwriting or drawings. By a simple but very ingenious mechanism the writing done on the transmitter in London is simultaneously reproduced in exact facsimile by the receiver—say in Leeds.

Thus a business transaction can be done in writing without the loss of time involved in sending a letter through the post. Similarly an artist can send his sketch of any event to a newspaper as quickly as the reporter can transmit his "copy." This will be one of the commonplaces of the twentieth century.

Before leaving the subject of electricity we must note that Mr. Rosenberg has devised an entirely new system of electric lighting, which will dispense with all wires and connections. A series of vacuum tubes arranged on the ceiling or walls of a room give out a diffused, lambent light as long as a small coil, which may be in another part of the house, is in action. The new century will not be very old when this system becomes widely adopted.

Turning now to the sometimes necessary, but always deplorable, art of war, there is little doubt that improvements in the range of guns will more and more tend to make it impossible. A gun has lately been

invented which will fire over 3,000 shots per minute with a muzzle velocity approaching 2,000 feet per second. The shots are impelled without the use of gunpowder or other explosive, and consequently there is neither noise nor recoil. Electricity is the motive power, and a small oil motor, mounted on a gun carriage, will work several guns.

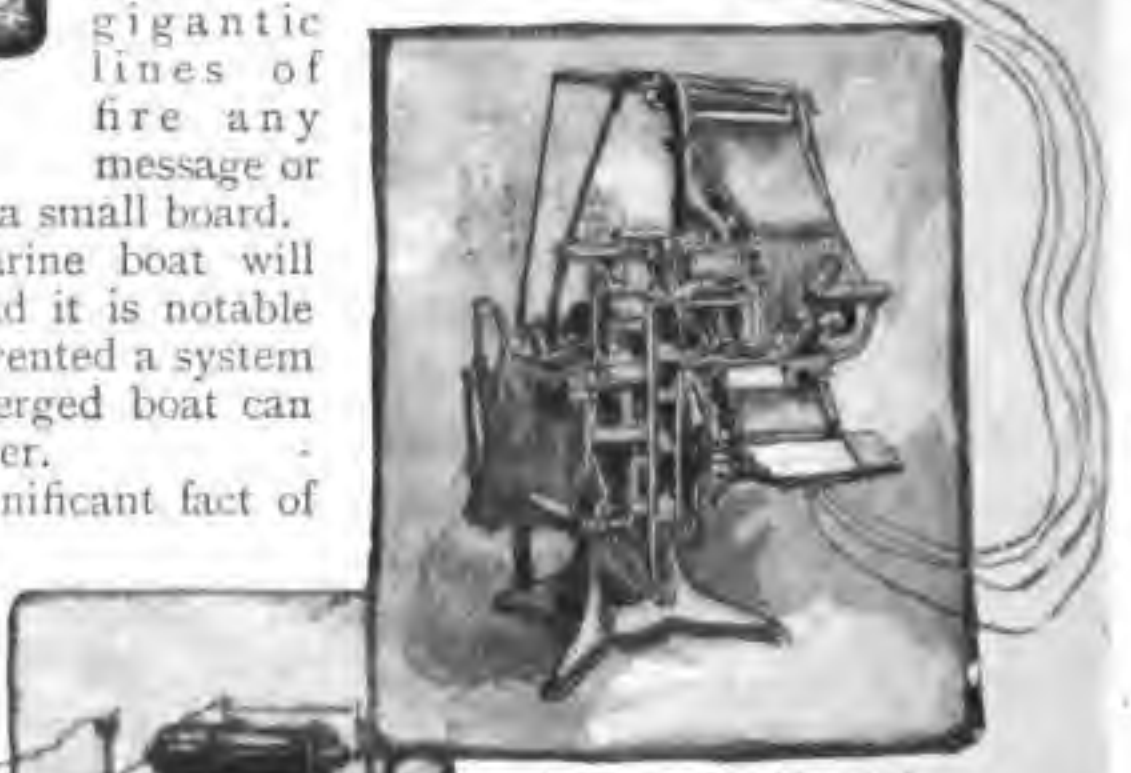
Another feature of war in the future will be the firing of mines—or even guns—by means of the Hertzian waves, which require no wires or other contact.

Signals and messages will very probably be sent by the lumiscriptor, an invention which, by means of a pantagraph acting on a blackened glass slide, and a powerful condenser (see next page), reproducesin gigantic lines of fire any message or drawing done by the operator on a small board.

HOW THE PAPER OF THE FUTURE MAY BE EDITED.



It will be possible for the Editor to set his own copy—



by means of an Electrical Linotype.

In naval actions the submarine boat will doubtless play a leading part, and it is notable that Mr. Rosenberg has now invented a system by which the crew of the submerged boat can see all that is going on above water.

But the most notable and significant fact of all in connection with naval warfare will be the extermination of the torpedo, which will be rendered worthless by the use of a new projectile that is now occupying the attention of the Admiralties of the great powers.

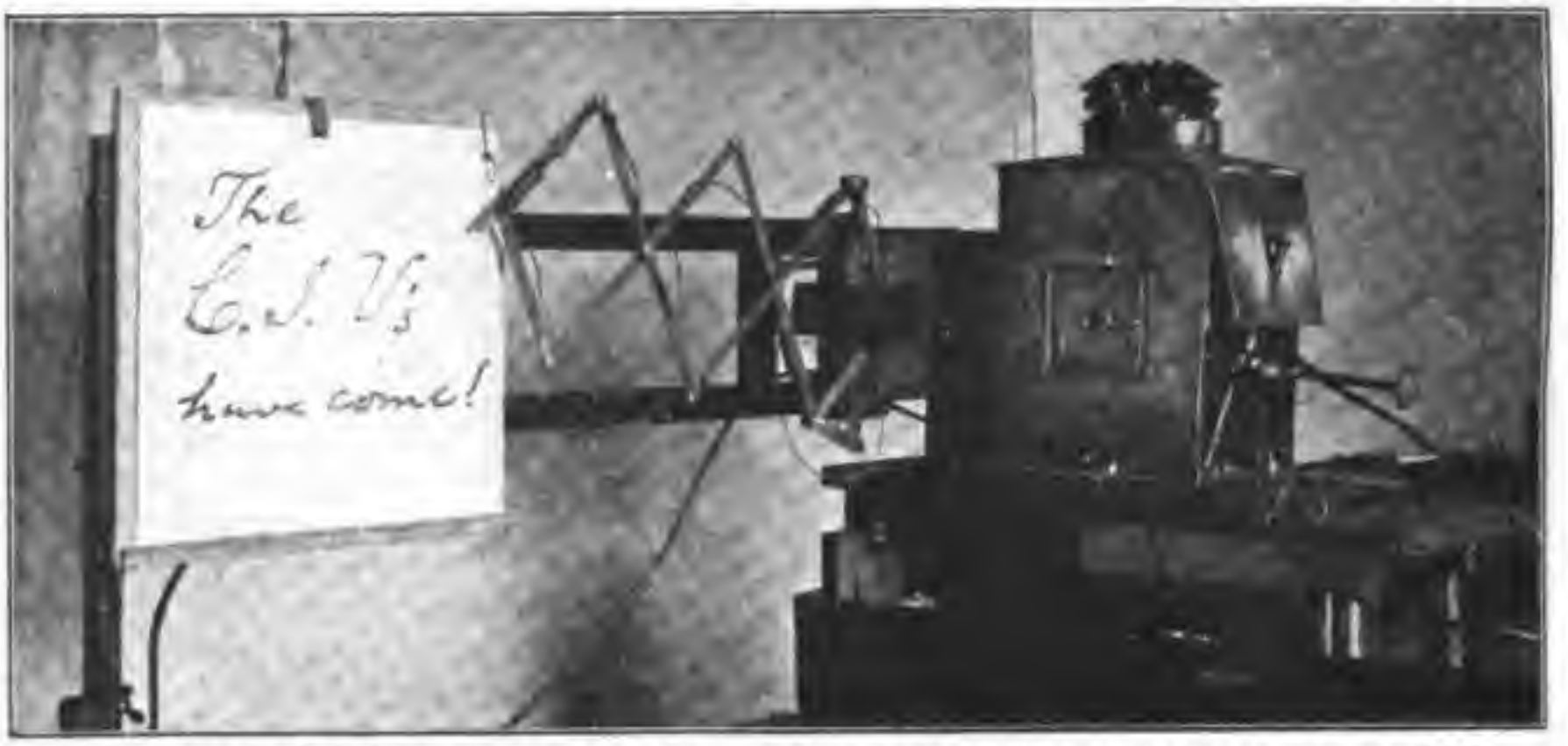


By electricity an entire edition of a paper will be printed at the same moment.

We shall shortly give an account of this new projectile, so we say no more about it now.

Coming lastly to the pen, which is said to be mightier than the sword, we note that journalism will advance by leaps and bounds in the new century. We will not dare to predict what precise forms of "New Journalism" may become fashionable, but there are certain directions, which we may indicate, in which the mechanical production of the newspaper will probably advance.

It is within the bounds not of probability but of practical fact that the editor of the future may set up his paper himself. Seated at a typewriter, or dictating to one, the leading article will be composed, and by an electric connection the depression of the key of the typewriter will depress the corresponding key of an improved linotype machine, and thus the editor will actually set up his article in type.



THE LUMISCRIPTOR WILL REPRODUCE IN GIGANTIC LETTERS OF FIRE WHATEVER IS WRITTEN ON THE TABLET.

Or again, by similar means the type may be set in the form of opaque impressions on a sheet of glass. This in turn can be placed upon a pile of suitably prepared sheets of paper, and by sending the X rays through them, by means of powerful Crookes tubes, the whole of the sheets will be simultaneously printed.

This is no mere visionary dream. It is an accomplished fact, and has been successfully used in printing cards and other small matters.

At the present time another system of printing by electricity, without the use of ink, is in process of development and has already yielded very satisfactory results.

We need hardly point out that the production of newspapers will be much more rapid when these new methods take the place of the present ones.

Here, as everywhere else, it will be seen that electricity is the secret of progress. It is not too much to say that as the last century saw the development of steam as the great motive power both on land and sea, so the new century will see steam supplanted to a very large extent by electricity, which will undoubtedly become the great mechanical power of the future.

At the end of the twentieth century the man in the street will read with amused wonder—perhaps mixed with a little contempt—of the slow modes of locomotion, the imperfect lighting, the inadequate telephone system, and the generally unsatisfactory state of affairs prevailing in 1901, and will wonder how his ancestors could have existed with such a lack of the conveniences to which he himself is accustomed.



THE TELAUTOGRAPH WILL TRANSMIT MESSAGES IN THE ACTUAL HANDWRITING OF THE SENDER.

The commencement of the new century witnesses advance all along the line, and he would be a bold man who should say that we are more than on the threshold of scientific discovery and practical invention.

The British Patent Office records some five hundred new inventions every week, and although many of these prove on trial to be impracticable or unremunerative, yet the presence of so much inventive genius in our midst is in itself a most significant sign of the times.

That life in the new century will experience many and great social changes can hardly be doubted, but here it is more difficult to forecast the course of events.



THE ATLANTIC LINER OF THE FUTURE WILL HAVE TURBINE PROPELLING MOTORS, WILL TRAVEL OVER FORTY MILES AN HOUR, AND WILL PERHAPS BE DRIVEN BY LIQUID AIR.

Shall we advance in the direction of socialism? Who can say? Yet it is pretty certain that the tendency is for the Imperial Government and the various local and municipal authorities more and more to take charge of the affairs of the individual. The supply of gas, water, and electricity, the provision of dwellings for the artisan classes, the education both of children and adults—these and many other similar matters are no longer left wholly to the enterprise of individuals. To a large extent they are now provided by the State.

It is probable that the new century will see very considerable advance in this direction, though he would be a rash prophet who should predict the complete municipalisation of the domestic and business life of the community.

But co-operation and centralisation will more and more tend to control commercial life. The development of "stores" and "universal providers" will probably sweep the small trader out of the field, and then it will be but the next step for the municipality to take over the control.

Whether such a development would be for the ultimate good either of the individual or the community is a very complex question, and one not admitting a general answer. Fortunately we are not called upon to discuss the matter here.

Other times bring with them other manners. New modes of life will necessitate a new code of etiquette. The ways of the eighteenth century seem odd to us to-day, and probably a hundred years hence our great-grandchildren will smile as they read about us.

Will the world be better and happier in the new century? To us it seems that the answer should be unquestionably in the affirmative. Scientific progress tends to moral advancement.

A moment's reflection will show that aerial navigation, rapid transit, the electroscope, and other inventions that we have named, will all tend to make crime and war more difficult, while improved social conditions will make them less attractive.

The facts we have stated in this article are but a few of the many that might be adduced in evidence of the immense progress in all directions which the new century will witness.



THE RESULT OF A TERRIBLE EXPERIMENT.

By E. Tickner-Edwardes.

I.

"BUTE WALTON? The very luckiest beggar on the face of the earth!"

The speaker was a tall, bronzed man, and the words were uttered so vehemently that everyone at Sir James Banyard's end of the table turned to him in surprise.

Dinner was over; the ladies were gone; and the talk, as usual at Sir James' cosy little medico-scientific *réunions*, had drifted into two main channels. The broad-shouldered stranger had attached himself to the little knot of men clustered round Professor Starkie's chair, and had sat quietly puffing at his cigar and listening intently to the renowned physiologist until Walton's name had caught his ear. And then he had turned suddenly towards Sir James' circle, forgetting for the moment all about the doctrine of transmigration of souls, on which the professor had been holding forth so brilliantly.

"Bute Walton?" the stranger repeated, more calmly and collected now that he observed all eyes turned upon him. "I knew him once. He comes from Bedford, and his wife as well. I knew her, too, intimately, long before she was Mrs. Walton."

"Then, Gallier, you are the man with the key!" cried Sir James. "You will be able to tell us all about the lady. Clinthorpe here was saying she was the most beautiful woman he ever beheld in his life."

The quick blood rose under the bronze of Gallier's face as he looked towards Clinthorpe. Then he turned abruptly away, the flush burning deeper and deeper under his swarthy skin, and spoke almost below his breath.

"Yes, she *is* beautiful; or was, I should say, for it is a good ten years since I saw her last. You know, Sir James, I have been all over the world since then, and so out of the world. And I had no idea, until I overheard your talk just now, that Bute Walton was anything more than the obscure country practitioner he used to be in the days I knew him. So he has come to town, and blossomed out into a famous consultant, has he? What is his subject, by the bye?"

Clinthorpe had kept his grey, glittering eyes steadily upon the speaker. He now laughed in his slow, mirthless way.

"You don't seem to know much about our new celebrity, Dr. Gallier," he said. "And yet you called him just now the luckiest beggar on the face of the earth! Perhaps you had him in your mind only as the fortunate possessor of the fair lady?"

No one could have been more astounded than was little Clinthorpe when he found himself suddenly seized by the collar with a grasp that sent his gold *pince-nez* clattering off among the decanters on the table. In a moment everyone was round the pair. But before a hand could be raised to separate them Gallier had released his hold, and had fallen back, confused and ashamed of his precipitate conduct.

Sir James Banyard, much distressed at such a *contretemps* in his house, stood wholly at a loss between them, when Gallier did the only thing possible.

"I am sorry," he said. "I must ask Mr. Clinthorpe's pardon, and yours, too, Sir James. I have lived so long among savages that I see I have forgotten that I was ever born and bred a gentleman.

Mr. Clinthorpe, I am very sorry. Perhaps if you allow me to withdraw from the house at once, Sir James, it will——"

Clinthorpe came forward, seeing what all expected of him.

"Not at all! not at all!" he said, holding out his hand to Gallier with a kind of sulky gaiety. "The funniest thing in the world! You must have mistaken me for one of your Gold Coast blackamoors. Quite a new experience, I assure you."

The professor's voice sounded from the other end of the table, where he had again taken his seat close to his own special Tantalus.

"As I was saying, my dear Polson, we have not only the authority of the great Lessing in support of this wonderful theory of the passing of a soul of a man after death into some other man's body. It has been held by advanced thinkers of every age from time immemorial. Pythagoras believed in it. It was part of the faith of the Manichæans. We can trace its influence century by century throughout all the East. And, for myself, recent researches and experiments have convinced me that if only we knew a little more about the mysterious connection between Soul and and Body, it would be perfectly possible to—— What, already, Sir James! Well, well, I suppose we must not neglect the ladies."

* * * *

When Gallier left the hospitable house in Curzon Street, he did not go direct to his hotel. Instead, he turned into Grosvenor Crescent, and stood for a long while in the quiet, moonlit night, looking up at the windows of a great mansion there. For the first time, perhaps, during many years of his past busy life he had allowed his thoughts to drift far away from nigger-doctoring and gold-prospecting in the West African swamps he knew so well. He was thinking only of a little country hospital he once held sway over in distant Bedfordshire; thinking of the cosy matron's quarters there, and contrasting them with the great blank house before him.

"Lettie Carrol, Lettie Carrol!" he was musing to himself, for he had never borne to think of her as Lettie Walton. "How long ago it all seems since you and I were splitting bandages together and talking nonsense. But you never understood how things were going with me—never! And now all that is ten years ago. Years! It seems ages and ages.

"Well, it could not have been his money," he went on, after a while. "He was poor enough in those days. She must have loved him, and loved him well. For if she had ever thought of money——" Something very like a sob burst uncontrollably from Stephen Gallier's lips. "Ah! It is the old fever! The old mad unrest! Will it never leave me? Will there never be a day when I can forget? What a cursed fool I was to come back after all these years!"

He was striding away furiously from the house when a smart carriage came humming by him, and drew to a sudden halt in his rear. He turned and saw that it had stopped at the Waltons'. With his heart thumping in his temples he walked rapidly towards it. The footman was already down, opening the carriage door, and a lady had descended. Gallier quickened his pace, and as he passed in the glare from the carriage-lamps his eyes came full upon those of Lettie Walton! He saw her start—saw her look of recognition. Breathlessly he hurried on; then turned, and knew that she stood looking after him, in all her old proud beauty, only heightened by the years that were gone. He came slowly back to her.

"Lettie, Lettie!" he cried. "Do you remember me? And after all these years!"

The lady made a quick involuntary step to meet him. Then he saw her glance fall; she turned abruptly—as he thought, disdainfully—away. The next moment she had entered the house, and the door had shut behind her. Stephen Gallier was alone again with his old year-worn misery, alone with his aching, breaking heart.

II.

"DR. GALLIER," said Professor Starkie, as he took a long, searching, wondering look at his burly visitor, "do you fully realise what it is you propose to me? Have you well reflected on all the consequences to yourself if my theory on this matter should prove to be an erroneous one?"

Stephen Gallier met the beetling glance as steadily as he had done throughout the long interview. His face had gradually lost colour, but his voice rang as deep and firm as ever.

"I perfectly comprehend the dangers and the chances, sir," he replied. "And I offer myself for the experiment, entirely foreseeing what failure may mean to me. At the worst it is only death, and that I

have rubbed shoulders with too often to care for at this time."

The professor got up from his chair. His face had become as bloodless now as that of his visitor. Slowly he walked away down the long laboratory to the window at its furthermost end, and stood looking out into the darkness of the hospital square. For a minute or two there was silence but for the soft lashing of the sleet on the panes. Then Gallier heard his step returning — quickly, heavily, all the doubt and hesitation gone from it. He came up to his visitor.

"We will try it! Yes! we will try it!" he cried, a strange exultation thrilling his voice and flashing in his deep-set eyes. "You are a hero, Gallier, and in a higher, nobler cause than ever yet fell to the lot of man. There is no red bonfire of war crackling round the path of your noble self-sacrifice. It is for the love of science alone——"

Gallier stopped him for very shame.

"Tell me what is to be done," he said, hurriedly, his glance lowered and turned away. "What process, what preparation is necessary? Say what I am to do, and I will do it."

Professor Starkie unlocked a safe, and took from it a small steel cylinder, such as is used by chemists for the storage of compressed gas. Holding it and guarding it as though it were of priceless value, he confronted his visitor, and began to speak in a voice still plainly overwrought by excitement.

"Now, Dr. Gallier, listen to me. I was a very young man when the possibility of this ancient theory having a solid basis of truth first dawned on me. Yet, until a very short time ago, all the research of a long lifetime had carried me little more than one step on the way. This much only I had fully ascertained; I had proved to myself, over and over again, that the soul was not so fast a prisoner within the body as scientists had hitherto believed. By gradually weakening, debilitating the tissues, I found it possible *to draw away from my physical self*. In these experiments I stood for a brief period by the side of my own body, feeling myself separate from it, but unable to move from its vicinity. Yet I never got further than that, and I always found it impossible to sustain the condition for more than a very short time, because the means at my disposal for reducing and refining the bodily vigour had been hitherto very deficient and temporary in their character.



"HE FOUND HIMSELF SUDDENLY SEIZED BY THE COLLAR."

"But now, Gallier," continued the professor, "all this is changed. You come in the nick of time, for I have lately made a great forward step. I have discovered a new medium; as I believe, a new element; and it is this which makes possible the experiment we are going to undertake tonight. From the common air I have succeeded in isolating a gas which has a most remarkable action upon the whole body, when taken pure into the lungs. Now, understand that all my experiments with it have been made hitherto upon animals, and for a very good reason. I have found that its peculiar action, once set up, cannot be arrested by any means I have been able to discover. The process is invariably the same. Once the gas is inhaled, all the bodily forces begin to subside. Slowly, but inevitably, the muscles lose their power of contraction; the tissues visibly collapse; the heart runs down, until it is impossible to say from the pulse whether life exists or not. In fact, for hours before death actually takes place, the subject must be in exactly that state of debility, that extreme attenuation of bodily life, in which, as I believe, the soul is no longer fettered to the body, but is free at last to voyage abroad and seek some new living earthly tenement."

Gallier had risen to his feet, his bright, bloodshot eyes fixed upon the rugged, enthusiastic face before him. He now held up a quick hand for silence.

"Tell me this one thing, professor. Would the man have the power to choose the living body into which his soul is to enter?"

"Dr. Gallier, I know nothing—*nothing*. Yet why should it not be so? My theory is that there would be a fight for the citadel; then the strongest would win, and—— *Stop!*"

With a cry that had a strange, triumphant gladness in it, Gallier had made a sudden movement toward the cylinder. But the professor held it from him.

"Stop! Man, you are not mad? We must have no dead bodies unaccounted for here! Dead men are stubborn facts, even in a hospital laboratory; and all the scientific explanations in the world would not save Professor Starkie, F.R.S., from the hangman. No; there is much to be thought of before the experiment can be commenced. Now listen to me!"

With smouldering impatience Gallier heard the volley of minute instructions through to an end. Ten minutes later he was in a hansom at the hospital gate, the fateful cylinder in his pocket, and the professor leaning his head in with one last warning word:

"Remember! It must be of your own free will; or not at all. You can draw back now. But the step once taken, there is no recall—none. Do you fully understand?"

He was answered by a laugh, so hard and sudden and reckless that he drew back in grim amazement. A hand was stretched out to him: as he grasped it he noted how hot and dry it was.

"Good-bye, professor. Until our next merry meeting! If it is in the flesh, I will not forget the countersign; and if it all turns out a myth, why then we must console one another through the planchette! Au revoir! Auf wieder sehen!"

At the Hôtel —— Gallier mounted straight to his room. He looked at his watch: it was nearing eight o'clock. Sitting down at the table, he wrote a short, hurried note; sealed and addressed it. Then, ringing the bell, he handed it to the waiter who came to his summons.

"I am feeling extremely unwell," he said. "Take this letter as fast as you can to Dr. Bute Walton in Grosvenor Crescent, and tell him to come as quickly as possible."

Gallier waited until the door had closed upon his messenger. Then, taking Professor Starkie's cylinder from his overcoat pocket, he turned the stop-cock gently on. The gas rushed screaming into the elastic store chamber. With trembling fingers Gallier set the mouthpiece to his lips, letting the sweet, faint current fill his lungs again and again. When it was quite exhausted he walked to the window, and threw the cylinder far out into the dense, dark shrubbery of the garden below.

Then, already faint and weak and giddy, he staggered towards his bed, and lay quietly down upon it, to await the coming of the man he envied of all others in the world.

III.

DEEP, blinding night, and a sense of falling, falling, through the limitless darkness. Then as swift an upward flight, meteor-like, through the black void again; far above into a world that seemed to be ringing with a thousand voices, and flashing with a thousand contending fires. Then down once more, yet slower now, and slower:

until his feet seemed to touch firm ground; until the voices were lost in the distance; until all the lights were dwindled and gone, all save one that now burned steadily near him.

Conscious only of this one unchanging thing in the giddy swirl of his surroundings, Stephen Gallier fixed his eyes upon it, watching it until its familiar shape grew clear upon his mind. It was the flame of a candle. Slowly his vision cleared, his brain grew calmer. He saw that the light stood upon a table; that he himself was no longer prone upon his bed, but sitting by it. Looking down he became conscious of a startling change about his person. The clothes he wore were strange to him. He caught sight of his hands. His hands! White, strong, yet delicate—*they* could not be his! Yet he controlled them. He felt the weight of a gold watch in one: with the other he held fast to something—something that stretched out from the bedside.

Cold, clammy—it was a dead hand!

With a cry he threw it from him; staggered to his feet; turned; and chanced upon the mirror. Again the cry broke from his lips! Not his own blue eyes, and sunburnt face, and greying hair; but another face—one that he had not seen for ten long years—looked out upon him! Bute Walton's! Pale and calm and studious—there was only one face like that! Wildly he turned again, and looked upon the bed. There upon the quilt lay his own form, the form of Stephen Gallier; shrunken, perished to a shadow of its former strength, yet still plainly recognisable.

And then, like a thunder clap, the whole truth burst upon him. Professor Starkie's theory had proved the right one: the great experiment had succeeded!

Shaking like an aspen, yet with a fierce joy already beginning to stir within him, Gallier crossed to his travelling valise. He drew out a brandy flask, and, getting it to his pallid lips, drank deeply from it. The spirit ran through his veins like fire, and lashed up his fallen courage. He strode again to the mirror, again he looked at the dreadful thing upon the bed. Then at last the events of the foregoing hour came flooding back into his brain. The long wait as he lay upon the couch, his life ebbing away, his heart failing, the cold of death creeping up his limbs. Then the arrival of his former friend; his own soul's leap tiger-like upon him; the conflict as they seemed to fall grappling together through the



"SHE STOOD LOOKING AFTER HIM IN ALL HER OLD PROUD BEAUTY."

outer darkness—he lived through it all once more as he stood gazing by turns upon his own shrunken body and at his new image in the glass.

And now one thought alone took definite and immediate shape. The old drab, lonesome life, the old helpless, hungering years of sorrow, were ended. At last the barrier



"HE THREW THE CYLINDER FAR OUT INTO THE DARK SHRUBBERY."

between him and the woman he worshipped was swept away. He was free to go to her now as swiftly as his feet could take him. Her love was his: his strong arms would soon be round her, his kisses thick as rain upon her lips. She would be his for all time now, his only; and neither life nor death should ever part them more.

The pale face, looking out upon him from the mirror, flushed scarlet at the thought: the dark eyes lit up with a sombre, gleaming fire. For a moment Stephen Gallier stood and met his own gaze, laughing softly to himself the while. Then, with a sudden impetuous haste to be gone, he turned, and laid a heavy hand upon the bell-rope.

"You have called me too late," he said, as quietly as he was able, when answer came to his summons. "The gentleman is dead; how, it is impossible to say at present. Ask the manager to step up. And you had better send word round to the nearest police station at once."

The scared waiter disappeared. The room began to fill with eager faces. As in a dream Gallier made the necessary depositions: as in a dream he went down the long staircase, and found himself at last outside in the dripping winter's night. Bute Walton's carriage stood close by. The coachman leaned from his box for instructions.

"Home!"

Home! The word was continually on his trembling lips as the vehicle flashed through the lighted streets. Home! The heart of Stephen Gallier was going home at last to the woman whose name had been seared upon it so many long years. But now she was his by right: he had risked soul and body in one great cast, and had won her. In his mounting eagerness he threw the window down, and called to the driver to hasten; stood up, straining his eyes into the bright-fretted darkness ahead; listened now to the throbbing of his own heart, now to the song of the whip lash as it fell upon the scampering greys.

At last the carriage drew out of the Piccadilly crush, and turned into the humming silence of the crescent. Gallier was out before the wheels had ceased to revolve. A moment more, and the gate of his new-found Paradise had closed behind him.

"Is your mistress still up?"

He put the question to the servant as carelessly as possible, but he knew his burning face and deep-drawn breath could not go unmarked. The man broke off in an irrepressible gape of surprise, and hastened to make answer. His mistress had just gone to her room. Without another word

Gallier hurried on, and up the broad, crimson-carpeted stairway.

He had not dared to show his ignorance of the house. He must find the way unaided. Door after door he passed, listening intently outside one, softly opening another. Only darkness in this room—darkness and the rattle of the sleet upon the panes. In this one a dim rosy light, with a supper table spread for two. Then at last a door close-curtained. He pulled the drapery gently aside, softly turned the handle. A bright glow of firelight within—and silence again. Silence? There was a sound there, suppressed, yet strangely audible—a sound of passionate weeping.

With his heart threshing wildly within him, Gallier pushed the door noiselessly back. He saw a woman sitting by a table, her face buried in her arms, her shoulders heaving up and down with the grief that was racking her.

"Lettie!" What sorrow could be hers here in this great luxurious house, with all that wealth, refinement, could bring her?

The exclamation, stifled as it was, reached her ears, rousing her in a moment to her feet. Silently she stood, trying to hide the tears upon her cheek, trying to bring a smile of welcome for him into her glance. But it was in vain: the tears flowed more abundantly than ever. At last she turned away; sank again into her seat; gave herself up wholly to the grief that would not be denied.

"No, don't speak to me, Bute! Leave me alone for a little while. I did not know you had returned. I—I——"

He had sprung forward, love, joy, infinite passion ringing in his voice, as he tried to comfort her. But at his first touch she rose again, beating him wildly off with both hands.

"No, Bute, it will not do. I cannot bear it any longer. I cannot bear to hear your loving words; you so brave and kind and trusting. An end must soon come to all this wickedness and deceit; and why not now, why not to-night? Bute, I must speak—sooner or later you must know—O God in Heaven, help me! help me to tell him!"



"'DON'T SPEAK TO ME, BUTE,' SHE SAID"

She was down again now, her face

hidden in her hands. Without changing her posture or ceasing to rock herself to and fro, she went rapidly on—

"Bute, listen and judge me. I wronged you when I married you, for I loved another. Oh, Bute, you cannot tell how hard I tried to overcome my love for him, but it has always mastered me. And now chance has brought us together again after so many years. Only last night I met him face to face. And now, Bute, I cannot, dare not eat your bread, and bear your kisses, knowing that I love this man. You must let me go away, and live my life out in some distant hiding-place far away from this great temptation. It is the only thing to be done."



"STEPHEN GALLIER LEAPED UPON THE WINDOW-SILL AND HURLED HIMSELF INTO THE NIGHT."

Her words died away, whelmed in her pitiful sobbing.

The man she thought to be her husband stood before her, white as death itself; his hands raised bickering to his eyes, as though to ward off some noxious, blinding light. As she ceased his grip descended, fastening on her wrist like a vice. He screamed the words into her ear:

"Who was this man? Tell me his name! Not——"

"Yes, Stephen Gallier."

She was at his feet now; clasping them with both hands; kissing them; humbling herself to him. Silently he drew away from her, away from the room. Blindly, not knowing whither his feet led him, he passed into the upper regions of the house. He felt himself choking. Air! Air! Tottering to a window, he threw it open.

"There is no recall —none." The words of the professor dinned in Stephen Gallier's ears as he leaned sightlessly out into the chilly air. No recall — none! But yesterday the thing he most coveted in all the world, this woman's love, was his; and he did not know it. But he had meddled with Eternity, and the Great Machine had caught him up and annihilated him. Now love and life and honour, his very soul even, were all alike lost to him; lost by his own act.

The cloud rift closed above: a great darkness was suddenly upon everything. It was as if the ultimate Gate of Hope were even then shutting against him. With a last despairing cry, he leaped upon the window-sill, and hurled himself out into the night.



A COMPLETE STORY.

By Archibald Williams.

Illustrated by N. Wilkinson.

THE underwriters at Lloyd's are a philosophic race, and take their losses with resignation. But their stoicism was being sadly tried by the unusual number of the yellow telegrams papering the "Chamber of Horrors," and by the frequency of the single stroke with which the *Lutine's* bell heralds some fresh announcement of wreck and disaster.

In the stormy winter season such things had their place, but it was now midsummer; the sea had been calm as a millpond for weeks, and the Channel remarkably free from fogs. So that nobody could explain the long list of vessels hopelessly overdue under circumstances which were at least mysterious.

For instance, the *Eupatoria* and *Hadleigh Castle* were both signalled off Land's End, but neither reached Southampton. The *Boreas* with all her passengers had disappeared somewhere between Guernsey and Weymouth. An equally uncertain fate overtook the *Seagull* packet between Dover and Ostend. A man found hanging to a floating spar off Great Orme's Head related how the *Gadfly* cattle-boat had suddenly foundered at dawn, before the crew had even time to swing out the boats. At the cause of the calamity he could not even guess.

These and many other vessels had been lost within a few miles of the English coast. It was impossible to ascribe such a series of disasters to collisions, nor was it likely that a number of hitherto unknown rocks had suddenly risen from the ocean bed. Barratry was, as a motive, out of the question. What then?

The anxiety, felt not only by the underwriters but by the public at large, deepened when a Wilson "Parrot" limped into Hull, her bows gaping from a wound that fought hard with the united bilge-pumps for the mastery. The captain deposed that an explosion had wrought the mischief, and an examination in dock plainly showed that the blow had come from the outside, and that, therefore, a theory of infernal machines placed on board the vessel could not be entertained.

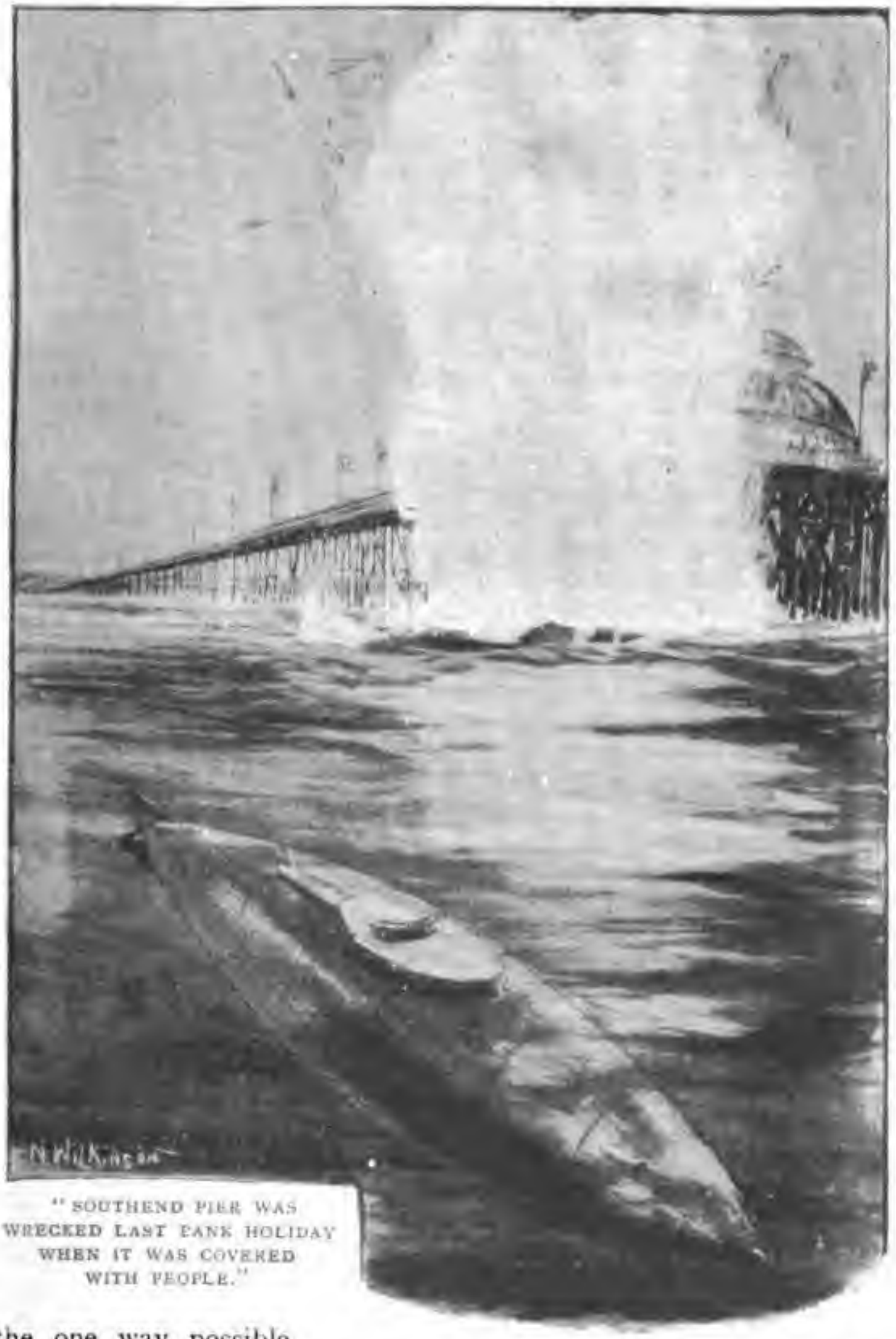
The newspapers had already been well supplied with sensational headlines for a full month when the mystery entered on its second phase. An ironclad flew into the air midway between Shoebury and Sheerness. Two days later a new torpedo destroyer came to a like end further up the Thames, and while British nerves were still raw from that mishap H.M.S. *Smiter* sank with a loud report in the Solent.

Anxiety and sorrow deepened into panic. What doubts could there now be of a plot aimed, not merely at British shipping, but at the British Empire itself? Thirty-five vessels missing and ten severely damaged was the tale of five weeks; to which the destruction of three units of our

First Line of Defence came as a fitting climax.

Granted a plot, who were the plotters? The fact that France had lately launched a flotilla of new submarine boats lent some colour to the solution offered by more excitable minds, that our great naval rival was the culprit. France had many grudges of old standing against us; the steady increase of her fleet could have but one object; of late there had been much irritation on both sides of the Channel. What more natural than for her to pave the way for an open declaration of hostilities by removing some of our warships?

While popular opinion became thus inflammable in Britain under the smart of many losses, the destruction of two French gunboats between Pelée Island and Cherbourg raised an equally bitter cry on the other side the water against perfidious Albion. Nothing less would satisfy the prevailing Anglophobia than that the French fleets should be immediately mobilised—a move to which the English Government replied in the one way possible. The situation was extremely critical, when news came from America that some agency had sunk five vessels in the New York "Narrows," and spread dismay among Yankee shippers. This impartiality of destruction cleared the political atmosphere, but shrouded the mystery in deeper darkness. France and England concluded that it would be best to shake hands and unite in a search for the common foe. Was it possible, serious people asked, that the prophesied Yellow Peril had at last arrived in the shape of a Chinese submarine crusade against Western civilisation?



"SOUTHEND PIER WAS WRECKED LAST BANK HOLIDAY WHEN IT WAS COVERED WITH PEOPLE."

II.

MR. MARCUS HAMMERSLEY, the inventor, was suffering from a reaction after his

ceaseless labours. He reclined in a well-worn armchair, the birthplace of many of his most brilliant ideas, a victim of mingled triumph and anxiety. The last four years had been a continual fight with difficulties and discouragements such as come to those operating in new fields on a large scale; but they had witnessed the completion of his masterpiece of skill and ingenuity—the submarine boat *Otter*. So far so good. But there was another side to the picture. What reception would be given the boat by the British Government? The official trials were fixed for the morrow, and though Hammersley felt great confidence in his creation, he could not disguise the fact that failure would practically be ruin.

His eyes wandered to a couple of photographs on the mantelpiece. The first, showing a winsome girl in dainty dress, seemed to afford the necessary antidote to his nervous condition. His eyes brightened, and he sprang up, exclaiming, "Faugh! What a dismal croaker I have become! I'm glad Milly and the men at the yard cannot read my thoughts at this distance, or they *would* be ashamed of me! And you, Matrondola, my friend," he continued, taking up the photograph of a dark, handsome man, and looking at it affectionately, "you shall have a word of how things have gone, though you don't write as often as you did."

He took his pen and wrote—

"My dear Stefano,

"She is finished at last, my *Otter*, a thing of beauty, as I am sure you would allow, and to me at least, I hope, a joy for ever. Yes! finished, as you prophesied she would be, in due time. I can now almost afford to smile when I recall the black day on which *Otter* the First was burnt to a heap of twisted plates with all my machinery and precious scale-drawings. If you had not been in Southsea to encourage me, I verily believe I should have sold my ideas to Armstrong to exploit for what they were worth. I am heartily thankful that I didn't. There was truth in your saw, *Al primo colpo non casca l'albero*, or as we put it, 'Rome wasn't built in a day.' It has been slow work, because my suspicions that the fire came from foul play made me reduce my staff to a dozen men whom I could trust implicitly. Besides, that little blaze cost me fifteen thousand, and at the present moment my bank balance would be a dear bargain for ten pounds.

"However, the official trials come off to-morrow in the Solent, and if all goes well the Admiralty will buy her for a good round sum, and then I shall rejoice, and a pair of dear eyes will sparkle in Kensington. In fact, *amigo mio*, my bachelorhood will come to a fitting end in a church.

"When you were last over here I could not, for obvious reasons, show you, the dearest of my male friends, the many details in which the *Otter* has struck out original lines. Here I may but hint at a few: the light accumulators for which the world has sought in vain these many years; the oxygenators which render me far more independent of the upper air than any whale, as they take us a hundred miles at one charge, and are easily replenished by electrolysis of water. And at what a pace she moves! None of your beggarly twelve knots an hour, but a good round twenty; and keeps it up. She is a living creature; she sees far ahead with my new water telescope; my audiophone is a splendid ear for her; and the proximometer is as sensitive as a butterfly's antennæ to the approach of any other body! Excuse an inventor's enthusiasm, old fellow; it is often a delicate flower, destined to perish beneath the cold breath of 'official trials.'

"The latter, by the bye, are supposed to be a secret—open enough for everyone to know just what is going to happen; so that I expect my expensive darling will play to a pretty large gallery to-morrow. And no wonder, with the *Teredo* looming so large. There are thousands in these islands who have to mourn the loss of friends, thanks to the dastardly pranks of that craft; and I assure you that I would gladly forego any reward, and give all possible *Otter* profits into the bargain, for the pleasure of laying that scoundrelly captain by the heels and completing the circuit of my accumulators with his wretched carcase.

"Have you heard of his latest exploits—the wrecking of the Southend Pier last Bank Holiday when it was covered with people, and a destructive invasion of our new harbour at Dover? I wonder whether there is only one vessel, because if it is so it must be as fast as my *Otter*, to judge by the way it gets about. After sneering at the 'submarine' for so long, our authorities are being rudely awakened to the gravity of their mistake. 'Tis whispered, and this particular whisper tells the truth, that an empty barrel floated in among our Channel Fleet the other night, the searchlights picked it up, and before you could

say 'Jack Robinson' the Admiralty was a good deal poorer in shot and shell. This serves to show the nervous tension in our navy, which is not manned by cowards.

"I wonder when we shall meet again. As soon as you can tear yourself away from your scholarly retirement at Tivoli come over to Southsea again. You shall have a trip in the *Otter;* and, in spite of your professed indifference to things mechanical, I am sure you will find it a thrilling experience. By the bye, be a good fellow and burn this. You know that I can trust you like myself; but servants have eyes, and even these mere hints might have a value in the right quarter.

"You now owe me three letters. Have you been travelling lately, or is the weight of your learning too much for your pen?

"Yours affectionately,

"MARCUS HAMMERSLEY."

These two men became acquainted somewhat dramatically during a boat excursion to the famous Blue Grotto of Capri. A sudden storm rose and capsized the boat, and Matrondola would certainly have been drowned had not the engineer come to his aid and brought him safely to land. Matrondola insisted on carrying off his rescuer to his home at Tivoli, and Hammersley was very relieved to escape thither from the fuss made over him as the saviour of a well-known writer and scholar.

A difference of nationality and pursuits did not prevent a deep and firm friendship forming between the two men; and Hammersley was unfeignedly glad when, two years later, the task of collating some MSS. in the British Museum brought Matrondola to England, and gave him the chance of visiting Southsea. During the visit, the *Otter* was destroyed by fire so completely that Hammersley, in spite of his firm square jaw, for the moment despaired of his great ambition—to give England first place among the nations in this particular branch of naval construction.

They parted at Southampton. Passengers' friends had all gone ashore, and the gangway was on the point of being raised, when Hammersley dashed up it and thrust a paper packet into his friend's hand. "Here, old fellow, a docker says you dropped this; tried to get at you, but they wouldn't let him on board."

Then he sprang down again, while Matrondola, very white-faced, turned the packet over to see that the seals had not been touched, and stowed it safely away.

Hammersley noticed his face. "The poor chap feels a bit queer over so nearly losing his precious codices," he said to himself; "though even if he had, it wouldn't have been a patch on my little business," he added, bitterly.

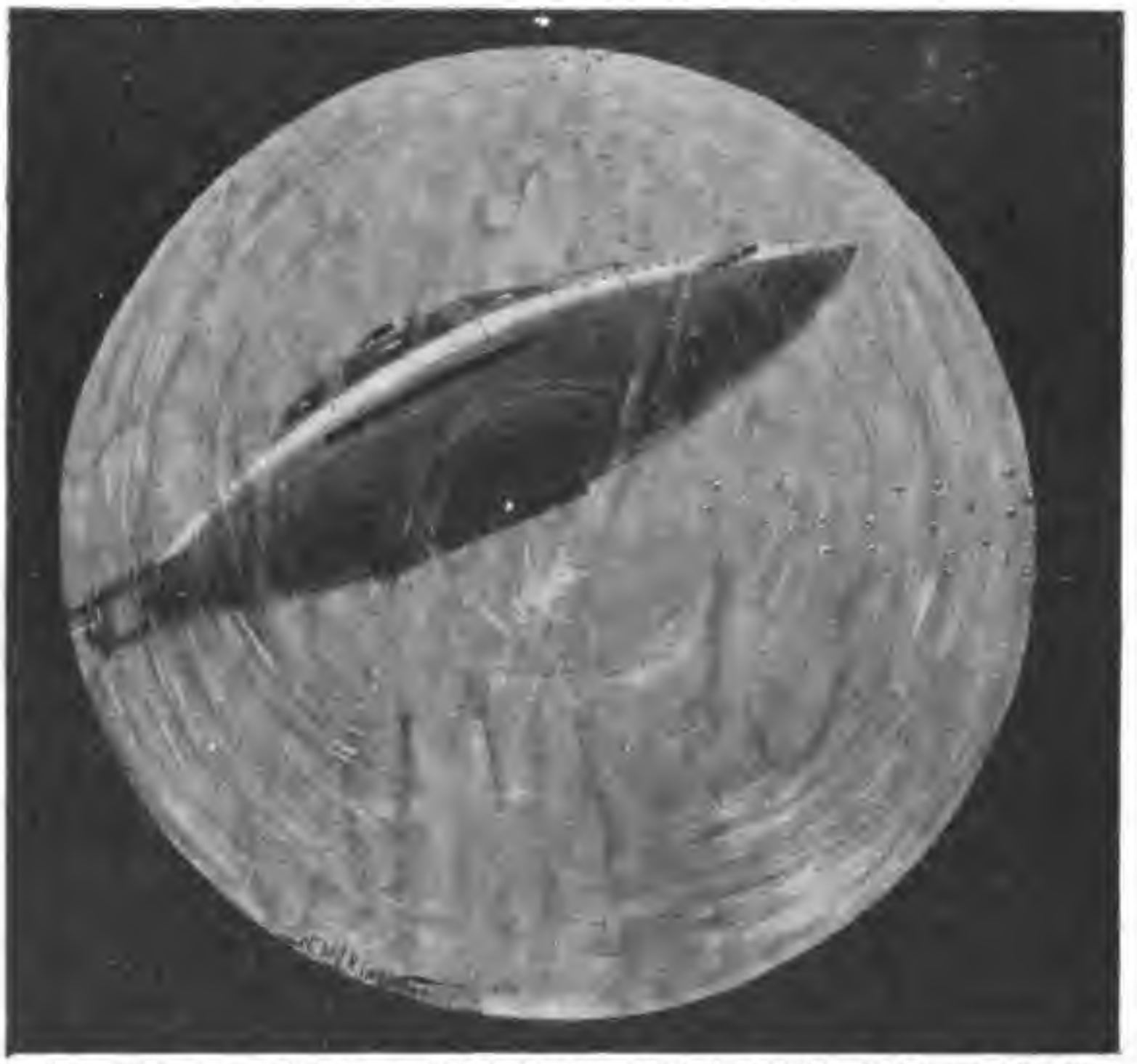


"HAMMERSLEY STOOD ON THE FEW FEET OF UNSUBMERGED TURTLEBACK, AND COULD SEE THE WARSHIPS READY FOR HIS ATTACK."

III.

DAWN was just breaking as the *Otter*, with empty tanks, glided from the Outer Camber, Portsmouth, towards the Channel. Hammersley, standing on the few feet of unsubmerged turtleback aft of the conning-tower, could see lines of warships riding majestically in their protecting crinolines of torpedo netting, ready for his attack.

The first trial was to be a test of secrecy of movement. The *Otter*, starting from Ventnor, had to enter the Solent, guarded at both ends by ironclads, affix half a dozen suction mines to their bottoms, blow up an old hulk moored for the purpose, and get clear away without being perceived. After that would follow speed and submersion tests.



"LOOKING INTO THE GLASS PLATE OF THE CONNING-TOWER, HAMMERSLEY SAW AN EXACT REPLICA OF THE 'OTTER.'"

The *Otter* slipped past Bembridge, rounded the Point, left Sandown and Shanklin on the right, and came to off Ventnor. There Hammersley and his select crew made a final and exhaustive examination of the machinery, tightening a bolt here, dropping oil there, and trying every one of the many delicate instruments in which the *Otter* abounded. In the tubes fore and aft nestled the deadly torpedoes charged with the explosives that would bring the last chapter of the *Antediluvian's* history to a sudden close.

At the appointed hour the submarine sank slowly from sight, and headed for the Hurst Castle entrance. Seventy minutes later three suction mines clung to the bottoms of as many ironclads. Hammersley's ear was hard pressed to the audiophone, which transmitted sounds from a receiver floating on the surface. So far no gun had roared the signal of detection.

The *Otter* then ran off in a N.E. direction towards the anchored hulk. Since the telescope had not sighted it as soon as he expected, Hammersley touched a lever, and an indicator showed that the *Otter* was gradually rising. He touched the lever again, and an automatic regulator kept the vessel a dozen feet below the surface. Then a tube, topped by a tiny mirror, thrust a few inches out of water, revealed the hulk a hundred yards to the left. The motors soon made a dark object visible from the conning-tower.

"Try the Orloff first," shouted Hammersley to Cartwright, his second in command. "If that fails we will go about for the other."

Cartwright pressed a knob. The *Otter* shivered as the torpedo started, and at once went astern full speed. The missile struck

the netting, and a tiny torpedo darted from its nose and burst a gap through which its parent followed. A moment later the unfortunate hulk parted with a terrific report, which sent a shudder through all the spectators.

Only two things now remained: to mine three more ships, and get away unseen by the many sharp eyes watching overhead. The first difficult operation being finished, Hammersley had begun to congratulate himself, when the audiophone sent down an ear-splitting noise. His face lengthened.

"They've seen us," he groaned. "Beaten on the post. We've got to go up now and listen to remarks."

But the conning-tower had scarcely felt air when the sea around seethed with shell in a manner truly terrific.

"Great heavens! this is a bit too real! They're firing at us," gasped Cartwright, opening the tanks till the darkened portholes proclaimed the danger past. Hammersley mopped his brow with a bit of oily cotton waste. He could hear the roar of artillery, and the shriek of steam sirens.

"Up with the mirror!" he shouted; "look alive! and see what the dickens all this fuss is about."

"Three-pounders in action, and the vessels under way, sir," pronounced the man at the mirror. "Seems as if they were firing at summat fifty yards ahead; I can see the water still spurting some tune."

Cartwright and his captain looked at each other for a few moments; they then took a deep breath and ejaculated simultaneously, "The *Teredo!*"

And scarcely had they said it when something passed between them and the light. Hammersley squinted through the thick glass plate of the conning-tower, and saw silhouetted above them an exact replica of the *Otter*—burgee-shaped bows, square stern, flat bottom. Was it a mirage or an illusion? No, for the object began to move. Something tore past the tower, leaving a train of silver bubbles behind it, and at that Hammersley pressed the starting lever right down till the motors buzzed.

"The aft torpedo, Cartwright. Don't waste it; it's our only one." The *Otter* trembled from a shock. "They hit us, but it glanced," said the captain, white but calm. The *Teredo* still rode overhead like a hawk above its prey, the ugly muzzle of its fore tube now and then looking downward threateningly.



"HAMMERSLEY FOUND THAT ALL THE CONTROLLERS OF THE SUBMARINE WERE DEAD."

The torpedo went off on its deadly errand, but only grazed the *Teredo's* propeller.

"We must run for it now," snapped the captain, steering his vessel under the other's keel. "Out oil-cans, and drench all bearings."

"Best go up, sir; we'll travel faster on the top, and some of us have wives and families at home."

Hammersley discouraged the speaker by a look, and inquired for the log.

"Twenty knot point five, sir."

Yet the *Teredo* hung on like a burr, running six to the *Otter's* half-dozen, until Hammersley's face became dark with doubts and suspicion. The enemy seemed to be the equal in speed of a boat which travelled eight knots faster than any previous submarine. The proximometer began to ring loudly, and a crackling told that the automatically reversed motors were dragging against the spin of the screw. For a moment the *Otter* shot to the surface, enabling Hammersley to see the projecting masts of a sunken pleasure steamer—a *Teredo* victim—about eighty yards straight ahead. He saw his chance to use the sepia tube, and pressed a button. A glass cylinder flew from the *Otter's* stern and exploded, darkening the water with a black, sticky fluid. Then Hammersley ported hard, and the *Otter* groaned as it shot round the wreck.

"Now for the emergency accumulators." The log showed an additional two knots. "The sepia tube balked him," said the captain grimly. "He'll strike France before he touches us, I reckon."

And so they returned unscathed to Portsmouth, where they heard how H.M.S. *Dragon* had received dangerous wounds in the quarter, and the *Centaur* had a bulkhead blown in, fortunately without loss to life in either case.

There were, of course, many long faces in consequence, and Hammersley felt very sore at this unexpected turn of events. The trial had indeed proved the value of his inventions, but it had also shown him that they had been stolen, and made murderously useful.

Early next morning a small boat came across from the Wight, and a fisherman related excitedly that, having the day before noticed the masts of the sunken steamer suddenly cant seawards, as though from a shock, he had gone out to ascertain the cause. He thought there was something protruding from the vessel's side, and that they had better come and see for themselves what it might be. In a few minutes the *Otter* stood towards the wreck at its highest speed. The situation revealed itself at a glance—the *Teredo* stuck fast in the steamer's bow, fairly caught in its own snare, the conning-tower jammed against the top of the opening blown by a torpedo, the diving chamber against the bottom, so that the occupants were cut off from all means of escape. To loose so dangerous a creature from the trap was a nice operation.

But Hammersley noticed that the screw was motionless, and drawing his conclusions therefrom, he sent down a diver who passed a five-inch coir cable round the *Teredo*, which, swathed in nets to obstruct torpedoes, was dislodged by a warship that came up to offer help. Hammersley claimed the right of exploration. The cover of the conning-tower having been forced up, he essayed to enter, but for some time the fetid odour drove him back. When he at last was able to descend, he saw three men lying among the machinery, and a fourth stretched over a small table in one corner. He turned over the bodies of the first three and felt in vain for signs of life. Then he approached the figure at the table, and when he raised the head a horrified exclamation escaped him, for the death-distorted features were those of his trusted friend, the scholarly collater of codices, Stefano Matrondola.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF MRS. MACRECHAM.

THE AMAZING STORY OF A STRANGE CAT.

By Richard Marsh.

With Illustrations by H. Brock.

DIRECTLY I entered the room I perceived that there was something the matter. He greeted me with a degree of effusion which, in Hereward Waller, was really quite unnatural.

"You had my note?"

I told him that I had, and that its peremptory, and even mysterious, tone had brought me off to him at once.

He regarded me, when I said this, with curious intentness. With his left hand he softly smoothed his shaven chin. Opening the door, he looked outside, as if to learn if anyone was listening. Then, returning into the apartment, he began to fidget about the room in a manner which was so foreign to his usual habits that I became more and more amazed.

"Have you—have you heard the news?"

"To what news do you refer?"

He gave what seemed to me to be a sigh of relief. I wondered more and more.

"I see you haven't. I thought you might have done. I suppose a great many people have. I believe advertisements have appeared in the newspapers. I know the police have been communicated with, and I have reason to think that notices have been posted up outside the various station houses."

"My dear Waller, I have not the most remote idea what you are talking about."

He lowered his voice. He even glanced furtively about the room.

"Mrs. Macrecham has disappeared."

"Mrs.—who?"

"Mrs. Macrecham—my landlady."

"Do you mean that cantankerous, narrow-minded old Scotchwoman who made such a fuss about your having a game of chess in her house on Sundays?"

To my amazement, Waller seemed to be positively agitated.

"S-sh! I would rather you did not talk like that, under the—the peculiar circumstances."

I stared.

"You don't mean to say that you contemplate going into mourning for the old cat?"

Unless I am mistaken, Waller actually jumped.

"Durrant, don't! I beg you won't! You—you don't understand. I am about to explain. Indeed, I sent for you here for the especial purpose of making to you an explanation. With your permission, I will take a chair."

I did not see that he required my permission to take a chair in his own rooms, but I did not say so. He sat down. He took out his handkerchief and wiped his brow. I had never seen him do such a thing before; he had always prided himself on his constitutional Arctic coolness.

"This is Tuesday. Last Thursday afternoon I was left alone in the house with Mrs. Macrecham." Again he glanced furtively about the room. "Polly Macrecham, Mrs. Macrecham's niece, had gone on an errand to a tradesman. When she returned she could not find her aunt anywhere about the house. She came up to ask if I had seen her. I—I said"—his voice distinctly trembled—"I said that I had not.

"About—about midnight"—Waller's voice again distinctly trembled—"Miss Macrecham came up to me again, and told me that not only had her aunt not yet returned, but that she had run in to all the neighbours of whom she could think, and that none of them had seen her; and that, moreover, Mrs. Smithers, who lives across the road, had been sitting at one of her front windows, had seen Miss Macrecham depart upon her errand to the tradesman, and had not moved from the window until Miss Macrecham returned, and was positive that the aunt had not left the house during the niece's absence. Yet nothing has been seen of her unto this hour. She—she has disappeared."

"Well?" I asked.

For I failed to perceive what the fact of Mrs. Macrecham's disappearance had to do with Hereward Waller's evident and momentarily increasing agitation.

"Well, you see, I—I am placed in rather an unpleasant situation."

"What on earth do you mean? You

don't mean to say that you are suspected of having taken advantage of the fact of having been left alone in the house with her to murder her—though, if you had done so, for my part I should have held you justified. Cross-grained old witch!"

"Hush! I would rather you did not speak of her like that. Under the—under the peculiar circumstances I really would." Again he wiped his brow. "I won't say that I am suspected of actual murder. But, by certain people, I am certainly suspected of something. And that the police have their eyes upon me, I'm assured."

"Hereward!"

"It's—it's in this way: When Miss Macrecham asked me if I had seen her aunt during her absence, I said that I had not. When, later, she asked me, more than once, again I still said that I had not. But it appears that the observant Mrs. Smithers, sitting at her window across the road, had seen Mrs. Macrecham open the door to a boy who brought a parcel. She had gone so far as to recognise the boy as being in the employ of Thorpe, the stationer.

"Inquiry at Thorpe's elicited the fact that his boy had brought a parcel, that the parcel was for me, that it contained half a dozen packs of playing cards, and that the boy had given it to Mrs. Macrecham, who had told him that she would take it up to Mr. Waller. Now, unknown to me, when Miss Macrecham had come to my room to ask if I had seen her aunt, she had noticed this identical parcel lying on my table. When, later, I was asked who had brought this parcel to my room if Mrs. Macrecham hadn't, I—I am afraid that I exhibited confusion."

"Had the old woman been to your room while the niece was out?"

"She had; and, what's more, she's in it now."

"In it now?"

As I echoed his words, I stared. I had not the faintest notion of his meaning.

"Yes, Durrant, it's an incredible and—and an appalling fact, that while her niece is torn with doubts, and the police are searching for her, dead or alive, in all directions, Mrs. Macrecham is, at this present moment, in this room. She has not quitted it, even for a single second, since she entered it on Thursday afternoon."

Beads of perspiration were standing on Hereward Waller's brow. I began myself to be conscious of a sense of vague discomfort. What did he mean?

"Allow me to explain." As he rose I perceived that he was positively trembling. "She's in this sideboard." He pointed to a piece of furniture which occupied a corner of the room. "Just come—just come and see."

I followed him across the room with feelings which I experience some difficulty in describing. As he produced a key from his waistcoat pocket, and, with shaking fingers, fitted it into the lock of the sideboard, I regarded him with a sort of shuddering aversion. Was it possible that I was about to gaze upon the evidences of some hideous tragedy?



"'LOOK!' HE SAID, REFERRING TO THE CAT, 'THAT IS MRS. MACRECHAM.'"

I was about to explain to him that anything which he revealed to me he revealed at his own risk, and that I should allow no ties of friendship to stand between me and the police, when—he opened the sideboard door.

"Look!" he said. I looked, with half unwilling, half fearful eyes. I saw nothing unusual, except that he seemed to have cleared the bottles upon one side, in order to make room for a large tabby cat, which was lying asleep on the top of a heap of what appeared to be Waller's underclothing.

"That is Mrs. Macrecham."

I supposed that there was something at the back of the cupboard which I could not see. So I stooped still lower down. There proved, however, to be nothing there. I felt a trifle nettled.

"I don't know, Waller, if you are trying to play off on me some idiotic little joke of yours."

"Joke! I wish it were a joke!"

I looked at him. I had never supposed it possible that a man could show such signs of physical and mental agitation. The sweat was gathered in great drops upon his forehead. He pointed to the open sideboard. "I tell you that that is Mrs. Macrecham."

"Which is Mrs. Macrecham? There's nothing but a cat, you ass!"

Never shall I forget the tone of voice in which he uttered his next words—as though they were wrung from him in his agony.

"The cat is Mrs. Macrecham!".

"The cat!—Waller!"

As he said that, I gazed at him in horrified amazement. In an instant it flashed across my brain that the cause of his unusual agitation was now made plain—too plain. My boyhood's friend had lost his mental equilibrium.

He immediately detected what was passing through my mind.

"You think that I am mad. Sometimes I think so too; I think that I must be mad. But reflection shows that such is not the case. The circumstantial evidence which goes to prove my sanity is overwhelming. At times I am almost tempted to wish that I, in truth, was mad."

I made a strategic movement in the direction of the door—a madman's logic is proverbial.

"Excuse me one moment, I just——"

He perceived my intention. He sprang between the door and me.

"Durrant, what are you going to do? You won't desert me! For God's sake, man, don't do that! There never was, in the whole history of the world, a human creature in such frightful need of the guidance of a faithful friend as I am now. I give you my word of honour, I'm not mad. If—if you'll allow me, I'll explain."

He explained.

"Durrant, I—I have been the victim of an unparalleled experience. Of so unparalleled an experience that, were it not for the undeniable evidence of a hundred various details, I should be persuaded that I have been the nightmare-haunted dreamer of some amazing dream."

He wiped his forehead with his pocket handkerchief.

"Last Thursday morning I had business in the neighbourhood of Fleet Street. I strolled homewards by way of Bookseller's Row. I glanced at the bookstalls. In one of the fourpenny boxes I saw a moth-eaten, tattered, marble-covered duodecimo. I picked it up. I found that it was a work which was entirely strange to me, even as regards its title. It was entitled 'The Art and Theory of Magic.' I bought it—I really don't know why. I wish to heaven a thousand times I hadn't."

Again he paused to wipe his brow. His manner certainly was most singular, especially for a madman. I found myself staring at him with renewed perplexity.

"When I returned home I threw the book aside. I forgot all about it till after I had lunched, when I chanced to light upon the thing as it lay upon the sideboard, half hidden among a heap of newspapers. I—I opened it."

Waller was speaking now as a man might speak whose mouth was parched and dry.

"I—I began to read it. It was full of some of the most—most amazing rubbish I ever remember to have seen. It was arranged like a cookery book, only, instead of containing recipes for cookery, it contained what purported to be recipes for the performance of feats of magic. I—I never read anything so absurd. It was headed, 'To Transform a Woman into a Cat.—A Simple Method.'"

When Waller said that, I started. I instinctively glanced towards the open sideboard. I saw that Waller started too, even more than I had done, and that his glance followed mine. My doubts as to his sanity returned.

I said, to humour him, "I see—a simple method. It is as well, when one has to do a thing like that, that the way to do it should be made as simple as possible."

"This—this was simplicity itself. In its simplicity lay its acute absurdity. One had only to go through certain elementary formulæ, and to utter rubbish, and, according to the book, the thing was done. I read it, and re-read it, and was still re-reading it, when the door opened, and Mrs. Macrecham entered."

Again Waller paused to wipe his brow.

"She had in her hand the parcel of playing cards which had just come from Thorpe the stationer. She had either guessed at the contents, or inquired what they were from the boy who had brought the parcel. 'More devil's pictures, Mr. Waller,' she said. And then she started off in the style which, as you are aware, has caused me more than once to wonder why I suffered such a woman to be my landlady. She—she had her good qualities, and even her bad ones had sometimes been to me a source of amusement, but—but I suppose that—that just then I—I was in—in a very peculiar frame of mind. I know that what she said stung me to an unusual degree of anger."

His voice sank to a whisper—a whisper, however, which was of a singular, penetrating kind.

"I had that—that wretched little book in my hand. The words of that—that preposterous recipe were dancing before my eyes. Mrs. Macrecham stood in front of me. Almost before I knew what I was doing, in the midst of one of Mrs. Macrecham's diatribes, I began to repeat the formulæ as they were set down in the book. The effect upon Mrs. Macrecham was extraordinary. She instantly ceased speaking, and—she looked at me! How she looked at me! Something urged me to go on. I went on. I repeated the gibberish as the book directed. Durrant——"

Waller sank into a chair. His head fell forward on to his chest. His attitude was of a man who had been overwhelmed by some sudden, overpowering shock.

"Durrant, hardly had the last syllable escaped my tongue, than Mrs. Macrecham disappeared, and on the floor where she had just been standing was a tabby cat. I never saw such a thing before in all my life—never! The change was so instantaneous that you could scarcely follow it with the eye, and yet I saw her change into a cat. A monstrous tabby cat! You know that I have a constitutional dislike to cats. When I saw this creature, purring, wagging its tail, and looking up at me, I gazed at it with unspeakable disgust. As I did so I heard someone running up the stairs. I guessed that it was Miss Polly, coming to inquire for her aunt. I kicked the cat into the cupboard, I turned the key, and I—lied to Miss Macrecham."

He paused—it was about time he did! I stared at him, scarcely knowing whether to deem him mad or sane. He sat staring, as it seemed to me, into vacancy.

"Granting that this amazing legend of yours is at least founded upon fact, did that fourpenny treasure contain no directions for re-transforming a cat into a woman?"

"I saw none."

"Where is this wonderful volume?"

"Durrant, when I lied to Miss Macrecham, in the first horror of that dreadful moment, tearing the book into a dozen fragments, I threw them, one by one, into the fire."



"HE SPRANG BETWEEN THE DOOR AND ME."

"That was scarcely a wise thing to do."

"All but the last half of the cover. I was about to throw it after the other portions of the book, when I saw, written on the inner side of it, some words which caught my eye."

"What were the words?"

"Here is the piece of the cover to which I refer. I have kept it. You shall see what is written on it for yourself. It may, or it may not, contain the secret of the re-transformation. After what I have seen, I cannot, I dare not, say. You will yourself perceive that the suggestion it conveys is of an extremely hazardous kind—a veritable case of kill or cure."

From an inner pocket of his coat he produced what purported to be the only remaining portion of that "fourpenny treasure." It was, as he said, half the cover. The book had apparently been a cheaply got up duodecimo, and had been bound in the days when "marble backs" were all the rage. The cover had seemingly been lined with coarse whity-brown paper. On this whity-brown paper were written the words to which Waller had alluded.

They were written in a bad hand, with a bad pen, by a person whose education, on the face of it, had distinctly been deficient.

"To tern a cat bak into a woman, cut her throte."

That was what was written on the cover of Hereward's "fourpenny treasure."

"You see," he said, "the hazardous nature of the suggestion."

"I don't quite understand the thing. Whose throat are you to cut—the cat's or the woman's?"

"I presume the cat's. You see, to cut a cat's throat would be to kill it—at least, such would be the ordinary inference."

As he seemed to pause for me to speak, I spoke.

"Just so," I murmured.

"To kill the cat would be to kill Mrs. Macrecham. Although, under the circumstances, it would be a moot point as to whether that was or was not murder, still, you understand, I should not care to run the risk, the more especially as I should always be haunted by a doubt as to whether I had or had not the brand of Cain upon my brow."

As he seemed to pause for me to speak again, I spoke again.

"I see," I muttered.

Rising from his seat he began to pace about the room. He spoke as if he were torn and racked by a thousand dreadful doubts.

"You plainly perceive, then, what is the truly incredible nature of the position in which you find me placed. Mrs. Macrecham has disappeared. Her niece is tortured with anxiety. Her creditors are dubious. Her neighbours are filled with a morbid curiosity. The police are moving heaven and earth to find her, dead or living. Already a whisper of crime is in the air. Wagging fingers point my way. Searching eyes see guilt upon my brow. If I move abroad, my steps are dogged. To all intents and purposes, the avengers of blood are already upon my heels—I am a marked man! Nor is it strange, for all this time Mrs. Macrecham is hidden in the cupboard of my room. And—and, Durrant——"

Waller came closer to me. He laid his trembling hand upon my arm. He looked at me with fevered eyes.

"There's another thing. I—I am afraid that Mrs. Macrecham's ill. I—I am not an authority on cats, but I fear that either the food which I have given her has disagreed with her digestion, or else the close confinement has proved trying to her constitution. I dare not let her loose; think—think of the long chain of possibilities if Mrs. Macrecham should go philandering on the tiles! Certainly she appears unwell. She refuses all food, and appears to be possessed by a constant lassitude."

He tightened his grasp upon my arm. His eyes seemed to scorch me.

"If she should die! Durrant, what shall I do? You see that there never was a man in more pressing need of the faithful advice of a faithful friend. Give me, I implore you, your advice."

I hesitated—it was a case in which a good deal of hesitation appeared to me to be required. When I spoke, I do not think he derived much comfort from my words.

"Waller, I don't know whether you're mad, or whether you aren't; I don't know whether you are having a little joke with me, or whether you aren't; I don't know whether you are telling the truth, or whether you aren't. But, in any case, the situation is more than I can manage. I am an authority on neither cats nor women. You have got into the muddle by yourself. I am afraid, so far as I am concerned, that you

will have to get out of the muddle by yourself, my friend."

Possibly he took my words to convey an intimation of immediate retreat. He grasped me still tighter by the arm.

"You won't desert me!—Durrant!—Hush!—There's someone coming up the stairs."

His hearing must have been unusually acute; possibly recent circumstances had made it so. I heard nothing. But, after some moments of the intensest listening, he proved to be right.

Someone tapped at the panel of the door. And, without waiting for an invitation to enter, someone came into the room.

This someone was a man. A tall, loose-limbed, beefy-looking man, with sandy whiskers, sandy hair, and, if I may be allowed to write it so, a sandy nose. He closed the door behind him, and, with a billycock hat in one hand and a stick in the other, he stood looking at us, in what seemed to me to be rather an impertinent manner. I do not know why it should have been so, because, although large and bulky, he was not a formidable-looking individual, and he was a complete stranger to me; but something about the man—his looks or his manner, or something—made me wish that he had postponed his call on Hereward until after I had gone away. I felt an inward conviction, as he stood there eyeing us, that our demeanour, both Hereward's and mine, struck him as curious. He looked at Hereward, and then he looked at me, and then he said to me, "Mr. Waller?"

"No." I motioned towards Hereward. "This is Mr. Waller."

"Ah!"

The man's tone was peculiarly significant, though significant of what is more than I can say. He took a good long stare at Hereward, then he observed, "I am William Brooker."

"Indeed!" stammered Hereward.

"Perhaps you have heard that name before?"

Hereward stammeringly doubted if he had ever had the pleasure.

"It's a name that's been before the public a good many times, and in some good big cases too. I'm a private detective."



"'MORE DEVIL'S PICTURES, MR. WALLER,' SHE SAID."

When he said that, I know that I turned right-about-face, so that I am not able to say exactly what Hereward did; but I feel sure that he did not look happy. When I again looked round, Mr. Brooker had laid his hat and stick upon a chair. He held an open pocket-book and a lead pencil in his hand.

"I've come to ask you a few questions, Mr. Waller, about the disappearance of Mrs. Macrecham."

As he said this, he regarded Hereward with what struck me as being a disagreeably inquisitorial stare. Possibly Hereward himself felt it to be so. He repeated Mr. Brooker's words in a sort of acid echo—

"The disappearance of Mrs. Macrecham."

Mr. Brooker continued, "Now, I'm a second cousin of Mrs. Macrecham's, and, although I differed from her on about eleven subjects out of every ten, it is not therefore to be supposed that I'm going to allow anybody, no matter who it is, to play hanky-panky tricks with her and never say a word."

"Just so," stammered Hereward. "Quite—quite natural. Will you——"

"One moment, Mr. Waller. Now, with regard to the disappearance of Mrs. Macrecham, it is felt by certain persons—and, among others, I tell you frankly, it is felt by me—that you know more about the matter than, up to the present, you have chosen to say."

When Mr. Brooker said that, Hereward did as I had done—he turned right-about-face. It was a foolish thing to do, with that man's inquisitive eyes fixed intently on him; but he did it. I could see that his face had become of a sickly pallor, and that the muscles of his countenance were working, as it seemed, convulsively.

"Will you," he stammered, "will you—will you have something to drink?"

Mr. Brooker's gaze was still intently riveted on the back view which he presented. Perhaps, to Mr. Brooker, that back view was eloquent.

"Thank you. It's all the same to me. I don't mind if I do."

Hereward moved to the sideboard. Although it appears incredible, it really almost seemed as if he had temporarily forgotten the existence of the tabby cat. For, when he reached the cupboard, and, stooping down, perceived the creature lying there asleep, starting back, he stared in what seemed to be speechless amazement. Just at that moment the cat awoke, and, after the manner of cats, began to stretch itself and arch its back.

Mr. Brooker's attention, hitherto centred upon Hereward, was now divided with the cat.

"That's a fine cat you have there, Mr. Waller."

Hereward seemed to experience some difficulty in inducing his voice to perform its office.

"Ye-es," he stammered.

"I suppose that you are fond of cats, or you would not make a bed for one inside your wine cupboard?"

Hereward gave painful utterance to another faintly stammered affirmative. Mr. Brooker was regarding him with evidently increasing interest. His bearing was not by any means that of an enthusiastic lover of the feline race. He stood glaring at the tabby cat as though the creature exercised on him some hideous fascination. Apparently he had forgotten his offer of refreshment. Mr. Brooker ventured to recall it to his mind. He drew his hand across his mouth.

"I've come some distance, and I think you were kind enough, Mr. Waller, to say something about a drink."

Mr. Brooker's, unless his nose belied him, was a thirsty soul.

Hereward, thus gently reminded of his proffered hospitality, stretched out his hand to take a bottle from the shelf. As he did so, the cat, as cats will do when they are disagreeably inclined, spat, and struck at him with its paw. The effect upon Hereward of the animal's unfriendly behaviour was absolutely ludicrous. He sprang back with what was unmistakably a cry of terror, and stood actually trembling with agitation.

Mr. Brooker seemed to be both amazed and amused.

"If you are fond of cats, Mr. Waller, cats don't seem to be fond of you."

Hereward said nothing. He stared at the cat. In return, the tabby stared at him. It not only stared, but, coming out of the cupboard, it advanced towards Hereward. As it advanced, Hereward retreated. The animal went forward. Hereward went back. It was a ridiculous and yet painful scene. Waller's distress was so wholly undisguised. There was nothing unfriendly about the animal's demeanour so far as I could judge. And yet, as the cat came on, Hereward shrank back with a degree of shuddering aversion which it almost gave one the "creepy crawlers" merely to look upon. When he had backed against the wall, so that he could get no further, Hereward turned his face away, and, raising his arm as if to screen his eyes, he actually called to me for help.

"Durrant! Durrant! Take her away!"

Mr. Brooker and I looked on with what, I have no doubt, were mingled feelings. The man crouching against the wall, and the cat looking up at him with what seemed very natural surprise, was a sight not often witnessed. Mr. Brooker turned to me, and asked—

"Has he"—he made a significant gesture with his hand—"been drinking?"

The fellow was suggesting that Hereward was suffering from delirium tremens. I indignantly repudiated the suggestion.

"What do you mean, sir? My friend is almost a teetotaler."

The detective smiled. I believe he was incredulous.

"He doesn't look as though he were very fond of cats, at any rate," he said. "Pussy! Pussy!"

He called the cat. Without a moment's hesitation, the creature came running towards him. Mr. Brooker took it in his arms. Seating himself, he placed the cat upon his knee.

"There doesn't seem to be much the matter with the cat, Mr. Waller. It seems to be rather an affectionate sort of beast."

It did seem to be so just then. Mr. Brooker made a fuss with the cat, and the cat made a fuss with Mr. Brooker. The detective stroked and tickled the tabby. The tabby purred, and rubbed itself against the detective's waistcoat. Moving away from the wall, Hereward stood silently looking on. Mr. Brooker eyed him with a curious smile.

"Do you know, Mr. Waller, that you remind me of a story which I was reading some little time ago. It was written by a man who seemed to fancy himself as an authority upon detectives. I think the story was called 'The Black Cat.'"

Hereward started. I believe I started too. Mr. Brooker went on, apparently taking it for granted that we neither of us were students of Poe.

"It wasn't a pretty story, but it was a strange one. It was about a man who murdered his wife. The only witness of his crime was a cat. Not a witness, one would think, greatly to be feared. And yet, ever afterwards, that man, victimised by his guilty conscience, regarded that cat with, among other things, an unspeakable horror—almost as you seem to regard this cat, Mr. Waller."

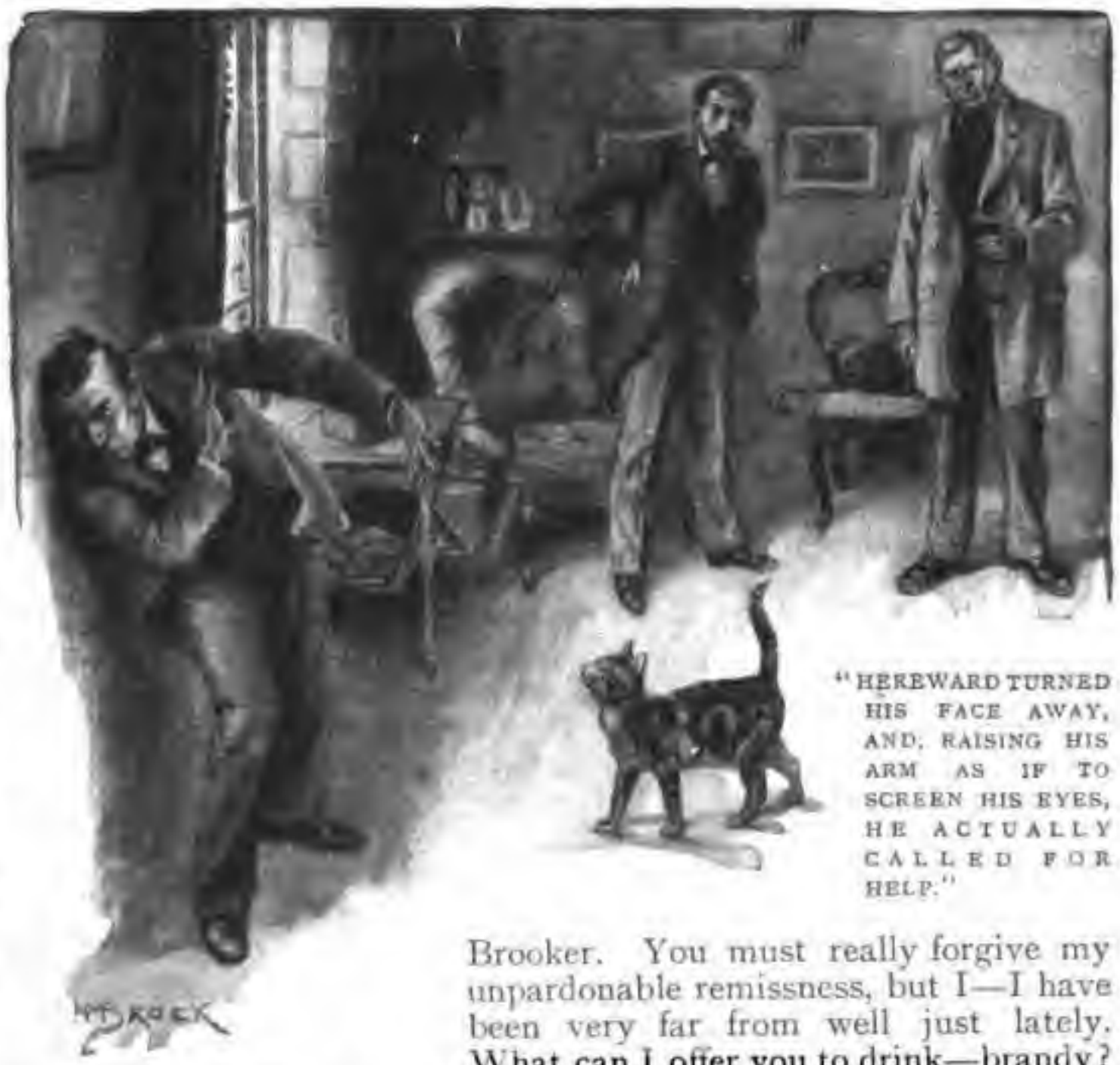
Hereward still said nothing. He continued to look at Mr. Brooker and the cat, like a man who, though wide awake, mentally struggles with some dreadful dream.

Perceiving him to be still silent, the detective went on.

"Since there seems to be no prospect of that little refresher, I think, Mr. Waller, if you have no objection, we will return to the subject of Mrs. Macrecham. There are one or two questions which I wish to ask you."

With what seemed to be an effort, Hereward managed to find his voice. His words came out with a rush. He was as voluble, all at once, as he had been taciturn before.

"Excuse me for one single instant, Mr. Brooker. You must really forgive my unpardonable remissness, but I—I have been very far from well just lately. What can I offer you to drink—brandy? whiskey? rum? Or can I tempt you with a glass of champagne?"

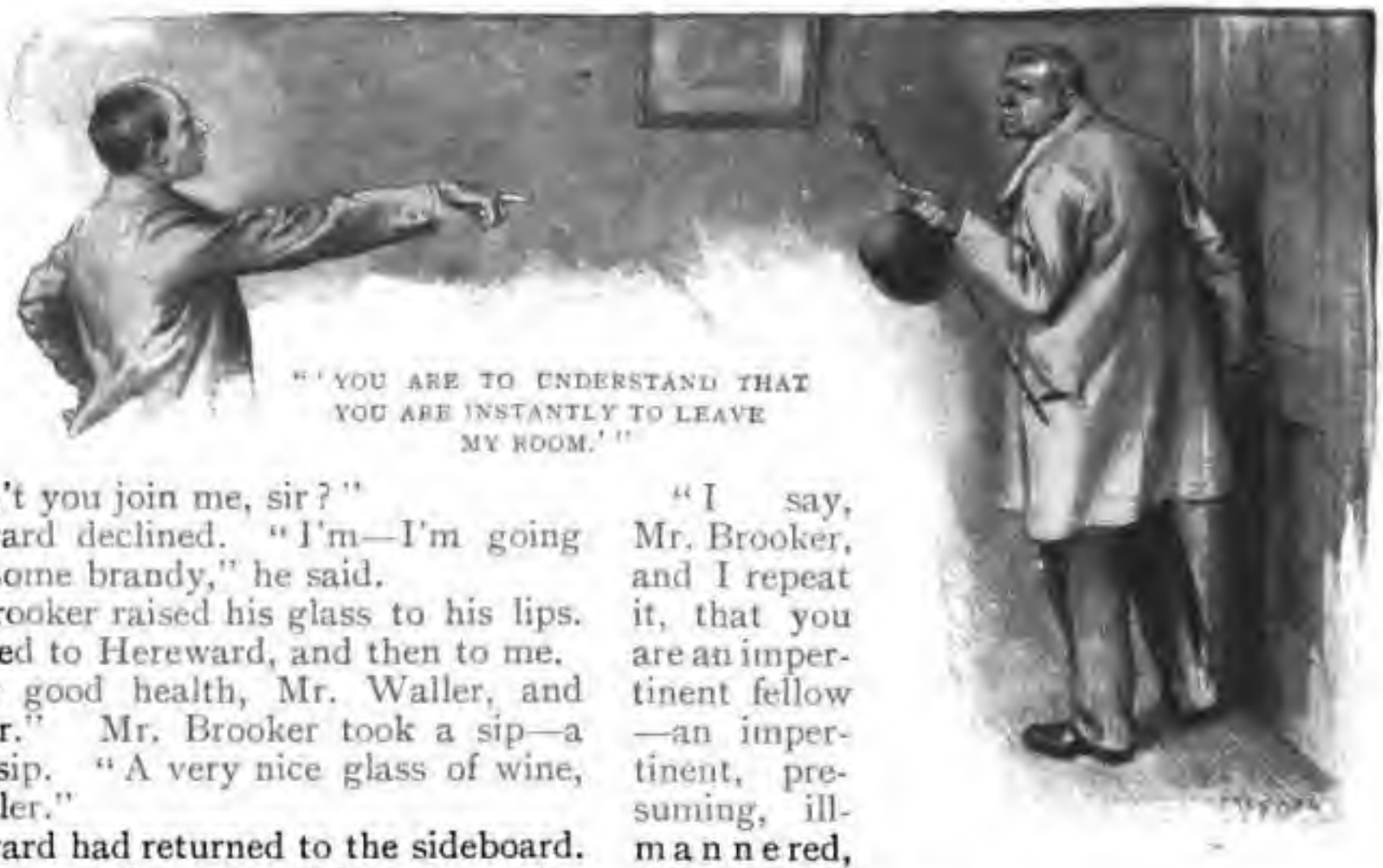


"HEREWARD TURNED HIS FACE AWAY, AND, RAISING HIS ARM AS IF TO SCREEN HIS EYES, HE ACTUALLY CALLED FOR HELP."

He moved rapidly across the room. But, as he neared Mr. Brooker, and the cat, he hesitated, and he glanced at the cat. Unless I greatly err, at the mention of those various liquids, Mr. Brooker's eyes grew dim. Like the proverbial sailor, he seemed to be divided in his mind.

"Well, I—I think I'll have a glass of champagne; it isn't often that champagne does come my way—thank you."

When the bottle was opened, Mr. Brooker observed that there was but a single glass.



"'YOU ARE TO UNDERSTAND THAT YOU ARE INSTANTLY TO LEAVE MY ROOM.'"

"Won't you join me, sir?"

Hereward declined. "I'm—I'm going to have some brandy," he said.

Mr. Brooker raised his glass to his lips. He nodded to Hereward, and then to me.

"Your good health, Mr. Waller, and yours, sir." Mr. Brooker took a sip—a copious sip. "A very nice glass of wine, Mr. Waller."

Hereward had returned to the sideboard. He took out a decanter of brandy, and a tumbler. He filled the tumbler with the raw spirit, and drank it, at a gulp, neat. Mr. Brooker winked at me.

"Almost a teetotaler," he whispered.

Having re-filled, and re-emptied, his own glass, Mr. Brooker returned to the subject which was supposed to be in hand.

"Now, with reference to this disappearance of Mrs. Macrecham. I understand from Polly Macrecham that you did not see her aunt during her absence from the house on Thursday afternoon. May I ask you, Mr. Waller, confidentially, as between man and man, if that really is the case?"

Hereward, in the centre of the hearth-rug, was looking more like his usual self—dogged and cold. I could see that the brandy had had its effect, but I was not prepared to find that it had done its work quite so completely as it really had done.

"Mr. Brooker, there is one remark which I wish to make to you."

"I shall be very happy to listen to anything you have to say, Mr. Waller. Indeed, it is for that especial purpose I am here."

Mr. Brooker affably refilled his glass.

"The remark which I have to make, Mr. Brooker, is to the effect that you are an impertinent fellow."

I scarcely imagine that that was the kind of thing to which Mr. Brooker had come to listen. He glanced up, in apparent surprise.

"Sir?"

"I say, Mr. Brooker, and I repeat it, that you are an impertinent fellow—an impertinent, presuming, ill-mannered, ill-conditioned fellow. I am prepared to say more, if you wish to hear it. I shall say more, if you do not take care. Uninvited, you have intruded yourself into my apartments, with the ignorantly avowed purpose of asking me insolent questions about a subject in which I take not the slightest interest. Such being the case, you will be so good, upon my invitation, as to take yourself, instantly, outside my rooms."

Mr. Brooker's glass had paused half way to his lips. There could be no doubt that he was surprised. There had been nothing, till then, in Hereward's manner to lead him to suppose that this was the kind of man he was.

"Am I to understand that you decline to give me any information about Mrs. Macrecham?"

"You are to understand that you are instantly to leave my room. You are a bigger man than I am, Mr. Brooker, but there have been instances of the bigger man being thrown by the smaller man down two flights of stairs."

Hereward advanced to Mr. Brooker.

"Are you going, sir?"

Mr. Brooker still hesitated, for one second, not for more. When he saw the look that was on Hereward's face, and perceived the sort of mood he was in, he deemed discretion to be the better part of valour.

"I am going, sir—oh, yes, I'm going." He took his hat and stick from a chair.

Being, as he deemed, at a safe distance, he had a parting shot at Hereward.

"You will hear from me again, sir, make no mistake about that. I believe that that poor dumb cat, if she could only speak, could reveal a tale of horror which would make the blood run cold. And it shall be revealed to the world, sir, and by me!" Mr. Brooker put his hat upon his head. "I will not say good-bye, Mr. Waller, but—*au revoir*."

And Mr. Brooker went.

Hereward stood still for a moment or two after the detective's departure. It struck me that he was listening, to make sure that he was descending the stairs. Then he turned to me. He spoke with a peculiar intensity of passion.

"You hear what he says? He suspects me—even that dull-witted fool! He perceives—even that dullard!—that the secret of the mystery is hidden in the bosom of the cat—that mottled beast!"

Hereward went on.

"I have made up my mind. The other recipe was successful—too successful! Why should this one not be successful too? I will do it!"

"You will do what?" I ventured, mildly, to inquire.

"I will slit Mrs. Macrecham's throat from ear to ear! If I don't, Durrant, I shall go raving mad! There's a butcher in the street!"

I did not see the inevitable connection which existed between his mental condition and a butcher, but, as he looked out of the window, I looked too. A butcher boy was on the opposite side of the road, whistling, and swinging an empty tray. Hereward threw up the window. He hailed the butcher boy.

"Butcher! Butcher!" The butcher boy looked up. "Come here, I want you!" The butcher boy crossed the road. Hereward turned to me. "Wait—I shan't be a moment! I'm going to let him in. See—see that Mrs. Macrecham doesn't leave the room."

It scarcely was more than a moment before he reappeared in the room with the wondering butcher boy. He came at once to the point

"Butcher, would you like to earn half a sovereign?"

The butcher boy grinned.

"I wouldn't mind, sir."

"Cut that cat's throat and I will give you half a sovereign."

Hereward pointed to the unconscious tabby, who still was quietly licking her paws in a corner of the room.

"If I was to take her home I'd do for her in a better way than that, sir."

Hereward did not relish the butcher boy's suggestion.

"You will either cut her throat, or you will do nothing at all."

The butcher boy did not seem to quite know what to make of Hereward's manner.

"Is it your cat, sir?"

"Of course it's my cat. What do you mean?"

"Well, sir, the other day a party give me a cat, and half a crown to do for it; and when I'd done for it, I found that it was the party's cat what lived next door to this here first party—an old lady's cat it was. And didn't she go on when she



"THAT PERFIDIOUS BUTCHER BOY ALLURED THE TRUSTFUL TABBY."

found out I'd done for it! She come round to my master—she's a customer of his—and he almost give me the sack, though it wasn't no fault of mine. I didn't know whose cat it was."

"This cat is mine all right. Take it into my back yard, and cut its throat at once, and I'll give you a sovereign."

"A sovereign!" The butcher boy's eyes glistened. "I'll do it. I've got a sharp knife in my pocket."

He produced the knife. It *was* a knife, a murderous-looking weapon. That perfidious butcher boy, with soft allurements, enticed that trustful tabby. He held out his hand invitingly.



"THE BUTCHER BOY RAN DOWN THE STREET AS IF SATAN WERE AT HIS HEELS."

"Pussy! pussy!" he cried.

The unsuspecting cat came trotting towards him across the room. Possibly she thought that he smelt of meat. She little knew that he intended to make meat of her! The butcher boy took her up into his arms.

"If you go downstairs you will easily find your way to the yard. When you've done it, come back to me for the sovereign."

The butcher boy left the room with his unconscious burden in his arms. Directly he had gone, Hereward turned again to the decanter and the tumbler. This time I did interpose.

"If I were you, Hereward, I would leave that brandy alone. It strikes me that you have had more than enough of it already."

The only notice he took of what I said was to gulp down another half-tumblerful.

"I must! I must!" he declared. "Durrant, if—if he were to kill her!"

It struck me as extremely probable that he would kill her—if "he" meant the butcher's boy, and "her" meant the cat. I did not see what else could reasonably be expected. To cut a cat's throat is not generally supposed to be the best means of prolonging the animal's life. However, I said nothing; it was a matter between the butcher boy and Hereward.

Waller's sitting-room and bedroom adjoin each other. They communicate by means of folding doors. The bedroom window overlooks the yard which was to be the scene of the approaching tragedy. Opening the folding doors, Hereward entered the bedroom with the evident intention of being a spectator of the coming drama. I preferred to remain where I was.

However, Hereward, at the bedroom window, managed to give me, at the sitting-room window, a sufficiently lively idea of what was going on.

"Here he is! He's got her! He's opening his knife! He's—he's going to cut her throat!" Hereward's voice, coming to me in quick, eager, almost frenzied tones, made me feel as though I were witnessing—and aiding and abetting in—a murder. "He's cut her throat. Oh-h! oh-h! oh-h!" Hereward began screeching in a manner the like of which I never heard before or since. "Mrs. Macrecham! —Mrs. Macrecham!"

I had not at the moment the faintest notion of what it was he meant, but I knew that, whatever it was, I wished he wouldn't. There was a sound below as of someone making a tumultuous entry from the rear of the house. I heard the area door thrown frantically open. I saw the butcher boy come tearing up the area steps. When he reached the top he went rushing down the street, hatless, trayless, sovereignless, as if Satan was at his heels.

And, a moment afterwards, I heard, downstairs, a voice—a well-known voice.

It was the voice of Mrs. Macrecham. She was addressing herself to Mr. Brooker, who had apparently delayed his departure from the house for the sake of pursuing his inquiries. Judging from her tone, she was addressing him on one of those eleven subjects out of every ten on which, as he himself allowed, they were wont to differ.



SOME UNSWORN M.P.'s.

By Norman Wentworth.

ONE does not as a rule associate any belief in what are disrespectfully termed "spooks" with the shrewd, practical M.P. He is much too sensible, you would say, for any foolish ideas of that kind. Yet most historic buildings and assemblies have their own private and peculiar ghosts, and would it not be a pity if the House of Commons were ineligible for a place among the number?

People whose minds have a leaning towards the superstitious would at any rate fancy so, no doubt. And, as a matter of fact, the Houses of Parliament have a highly respectable set, and there are plenty of hon. members who can tell you all about them, and give you chapter and date and evidence, too, of their appearances, their peculiarities, their habits and customs, such as would make the flesh of any young and superstitious M.P. creep uncomfortably.

The queerest part of it is that there are two good cases on record of the ghosts of living people having appeared in the House of Commons, and one of them was that of a sitting member, a no less well-known gentleman than Mr. T. P. O'Connor.

There is any amount of evidence to substantiate the appearance of "T.P.'s" ghost in the Spring of 1897. Why it should choose to appear whilst the hon. member still endures the earthly coil must be a matter for conjecture for all but the ghost itself, though those learned in the habits of the spook do say that when the persons they represent are suffering mental uneasiness their phantoms are sometimes seen. On this ground there was ample excuse for the intrusion of the "T.P." wraith in the House, for it actually entered the hallowed precincts and *sat itself down on the third Bench on the Opposition side below the gangway, where Mr. O'Connor usually sits.* A telegram had previously called the gentleman himself to Ireland to the bedside of his dying father. A friend of his, Mr. J. G. Swift McNeill, M.P., was not aware of this fact, and was as positive as he could be that that evening he saw him sitting in his usual place! Others who knew "T.P." well were equally certain.



MR. T. P. O'CONNOR WAS SEEN IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS WHEN HE WAS IN IRELAND!

The other ghost of a living person is that of the wife of one of the officials of the House of Commons, and this particular wraith made its



EARL GREY DECLARED THAT HE THREE TIMES SAW A DEATH'S HEAD WHEN INTRODUCING THE REFORM BILL.

appearance even more recently. Many of her friends and acquaintances declare most positively that they saw it. The lady resides within the precincts of the House, and one night the handle of her bedroom door was quietly turned and the door was thrown ajar.

That in itself seemed nothing, and the lady simply closed the door again, but a few minutes later it was opened in the same way. There was no one about, and, a little puzzled, she rang the bell for the butler. When this latter individual saw her he had a fright, for he declared emphatically that he had passed the lady herself in the corridor just before answering the summons! He had no doubt about it, and others, too, had seen the lady where she certainly was not. There was the mystery, and there the ghost.

Some people fancy that this was not a new wraith at all, but was a revival of the "White Lady" ghost which haunted the House of Commons for a period thirty or forty years ago. This was the figure of a lady clad in robes of white, and it trailed along the corridors in different parts of the House night after night, and was seen by scores of people.

Another female Parliamentary ghost was the "Terrace Ghost," which has not been seen for twenty years or more, but which used to be a fairly constant visitor to the terrace on nasty, foggy nights. It had a distinct preference for bad weather, and such was its reality that one night in 1878 an attendant, named Ralph, was almost frightened out of his life on seeing it.

Its attire was always wet and dripping, as if it had arisen from the river, and it was its habit to walk slowly along the whole length of the terrace, and then at the end to gaze up with a look of anguish at the big building. Then it gave vent to a terrifying scream and forthwith cast itself into the river and was lost to view. This is a ghost story which suggests a romance. What past or present M.P. is implicated?

There is another Parliamentary "ghost" which apparently resides in the river, and that is the Big Ben ghost, which is a spectral gentleman of very bad omen. Almost a score of people are ready to swear they have seen it, and that not very long ago.

Where the omen comes in is that when it appears a member of the Royal Family has invariably died on the following day.

The Big Ben ghost made its last unwelcome visits to Westminster on December 13th, 1861, December 13th, 1878, and January

13th, 1892—please note the days of the month—and on the following days respectively the country mourned the deaths of the Prince Consort, Princess Alice and the Duke of Clarence. This ghost is an oarsman, for it comes as a bent old man in a rotten old skiff, which glides along from the Surrey side of the river a little below Westminster Bridge, shoots the third arch and then dashes into the terrace wall of the House at the instant that Big Ben clangs the first of his midnight strokes. Nothing more is seen of it.

The last time it accomplished this performance a river police boat saw it, challenged it, and, getting no response, gave chase ; but the ghost's vanishing trick was too much for the officers, who nearly upset their boat through going headlong into the Terrace themselves. What is one to think when it is gravely stated that a constable who was on duty on the Terrace at the time saw the whole thing and reported it to Scotland Yard? But Scotland Yard was helpless.

There is also a "Radiant Boy" ghost in the House of Commons, who is a very unhappy sort of creature, wandering about from room to room in a most melancholy manner and moaning pitifully all the time. Its eyes are of remarkable brightness, but it never looks up nor before it, keeping its gaze rivetted upon the floor. Its face is a deathly white, and a silver flame shines like a halo round its head as it pursues its mournful course, with the palms of its hands extended and parallel with the ground. So at all events say they who claim to have seen the spectre.

Even a Prime Minister—the second Earl Grey—declared that he saw a ghost in Parliament, and he was, without doubt, terribly upset at the apparition. The Earl was by no means a superstitious man ; but he declared that while he was delivering his great speech on the introduction of the Reform Bill he three times saw a death's head appear right in front of him. It came for a few seconds clearly and distinctly, and then faded away into nothingness.

What renders this story still more remarkable is the certain fact that the Earl's daughter, Lady Georgina, herself declared that she saw much the same thing, and she told her story to her father before she was aware of his own.

Another authenticated story is of a ghost which was so well acquainted with Parliamentary procedure as to be able to vote in the Division Lobby. An important measure was before the House, and five-line



THE BIG BEN GHOST IS AN OARSMAN. A MEMBER OF THE ROYAL FAMILY DIES WHEN HE IS SEEN.

whips were sent out imploring Members to be in their places, and to take part in the critical division which would take place. One M.P., who was abroad and

very unwell at the time, replied by telegram that he would certainly be present.

A little after midnight the division was duly taken, and the Tellers at the door of the Lobby declared emphatically that they saw the gentleman in question, and they, therefore, counted his vote. It was discovered, however, the next day, that the number of votes recorded by the Division Clerks was one fewer than those recorded by the Tellers, and this one was that of this particular M.P. And there was the solemn fact that when the division was taken he was lying dead.



THE "WHITE LADY" HAS HAUNTED THE HOUSE OF COMMONS FOR MANY YEARS, AND HAS BEEN SEEN BY THE WIFE OF ONE OF THE OFFICIALS OF THE HOUSE.

Of course, this was probably a mistake on the part of the Tellers—at least, that is the sensible, matter-of-fact way of explaining the circumstance—but the Tellers didn't think so, and it was an extraordinary thing.

The ghost of Mr. Spencer Perceval, who was assassinated in the House by the madman Bellingham, when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, is said occasionally to haunt the House, and in the story of Mr. Perceval's life, written by his grandson, there is a most circumstantial account of a dream dreamt by a Mr. John Williams, of Scorier House, in Cornwall, a few nights before the tragedy, wherein he three times, with waking intervals, saw the murder take place just as it eventually did.

Mr. Williams was so much alarmed and impressed that it was with difficulty that he was persuaded not to go up to London and tell Mr. Perceval the story, as he wished to do. About the authenticity of this remarkably prophetic dream there is absolutely no doubt whatever.

Surely, if any ghost has a right to a place in Parliament it is that of good old Guy Fawkes, and he has duly attended there, though latterly he appears to have become sick of the proceeding, for it was on November 4th, 1852, that he last turned up. That was when the Commons first took possession of their new House.

THE LAST DAYS OF EARTH.

BEING THE STORY OF THE LAUNCHING OF THE "RED SPHERE."

By George C. Wallis.

Illustrated by Victor Prout.

A MAN and a woman sat facing each other across a table in a large room. They were talking slowly, and eating—eating their last meal on earth. The end was near; the sun had ceased to warm, was but a red-hot cinder outwardly; and these two, to the best of their belief, were the last people left alive in a world-wilderness of ice and snow and unbearable cold.

The woman was beautiful—very fair and slight, but with the tinge of health upon her delicate skin and the fire of intellect in her eyes. The man was of medium height, broad-shouldered, with wide, bald head and resolute mien—a man of courage, dauntless purpose, strenuous life. Both were dressed in long robes of a thick, black material, held in at the waist by a girdle.

As they talked, their fingers were busy with a row of small white knobs let into the surface of the table, and marked with various signs. At the pressure of each knob a flap in the middle of the table opened, and a small glass vessel, with a dark, semi-liquid compound steaming in it, was pushed up. As these came, in obedience to the tapping of their fingers, the two ate their contents with the aid of tiny spoons. There was no other dining apparatus or dinner furniture



THEY LOOKED AT THE WONDERFUL SCENES PRESENTED BY THE COMPLICATED STRUCTURE BEFORE THEM

upon the table, which stood upon a single but massive pedestal of grey metal.

The meal over, the glasses and spoons replaced, the table surface clean and clear, a silence fell between them. The man rested his elbows upon his knees and his chin upon his upturned palms. He did not look at his fair companion, but beyond her, at a complicated structure projecting from the wall. This was the Time Indicator, and gave, on its various discs, the year, the month, the day, the hour and the instant, all corrected to mean astronomical time and to the exact latitude and longitude of the place. He read the well-known symbols with defiant eyes. He saw that it was just a quarter to thirteen in the afternoon of Thursday, July 18th, 13,000,085 A.D. He reflected that the long association of the place with time-recording had been labour spent in vain. The room was in a great building on the site of ancient Greenwich. In fact, the last name given to the locality by its now dead and cold inhabitants had been Grenijia.

From the time machine, the man's gaze went round the room. He noted, with apparently keen interest, all the things that were so familiar to him—the severely plain walls, transparent on one side, but without window-frame or visible door in their continuity; the chilling prospect of a faintly-lit expanse of snow outside; the big telescope that moved in an airtight slide across the ceiling, and the little motor that controlled its motions; the electric radiators that heated the place, forming an almost unbroken dado round the walls; the globe of pale brilliance that hung in the middle of the room and assisted the twilight glimmer of the day; the neat library of books and photo-phono cylinders, and the tier of speaking machines beneath it; the bed in the further corner, surrounded by yet more radiators; the two ventilating valves; the great dull disc of the Pictorial Telegraph; and the thermometer let into a vacant space of floor. On this last his glance rested for some time, and the woman's also. It registered the degrees from absolute zero, and stood at a figure equivalent to 42° Fahrenheit. From this tell-tale instrument the eyes of the two turned to each other, a common knowledge shining in each face. The man was the first to speak again.

"A whole degree, Celia, since yesterday. And the dynamos are giving out a current at a pressure of 6,000 volts. I can't run them at any higher efficiency. That means that any further fall of temperature will close the drama of this planet. Shall we go to-night?"

There was no quiver of fear nor hint of resentment in his voice, nor in the voice that answered him. Long ages of mental evolution had weeded all the petty vices and unreasoning passions out of the mind of man.

"I am ready any time, Alwyn. I do not like to go; I do not like the risk of going; but it is our last duty to the humanity behind us—and I must be with you to the end."

There was another silence between them: a silence in which the humming of the dynamos in the room below seemed to pervade the whole place, thrilling through everything with annoying audibility. Suddenly the man leaned forward, regarding his companion with a puzzled expression.

"Your eyelashes are damp, Celia. You are not crying? That is too archaic."

"I must plead guilty," she said, banishing the sad look with an effort. "We are not yet so thoroughly adjusted to our surroundings as to be able to crush down every weak impulse. Wasn't it the day before yesterday that you said the sun had begun to cool about five million years too soon for man? But I will not give way again. Shall we start at once?"

"That is better; that sounds like Celia. Yes, if you wish, at once; but I had thought of taking a last look round the world—at least, as far as the telegraph system is in order. We have three hours' daylight yet."

For answer, Celia came and sat beside him on the couch facing the disc of the Pictorial Telegraph. His left hand clasped her right; both were cold. With his right hand he pulled over and held down a small lever under the disc—one of many, each bearing a distinctive name and numeral.

The side wall became opaque; the globe above ceased to be luminous. A moving scene grew out of the dulness of the disc, and a low, moaning sound stole into the room. They looked upon a telegraphically-transmitted view of a place near which had once been Santiago, Chili. There were the ruins of an immense white city there now, high on the left of the picture. Down on the right, far below the well-defined marks of six successive beach-lines, a cold sea

moaned over an icy bar, and dashed in semi-frozen spray under the bluff of an overhanging glacier's edge.

Out to sea great bergs drifted slowly, and the distant horizon was pale with the ice-blink from vast floes. The view had scarcely lasted a moment, when a great crack appeared on the top of the ice-front, and a huge fragment fell forward into the sea. It overturned on the bar, churning up a chaos of foam, and began to drift away. At the same instant came the deafening report of the breakage. There was no sign of life, neither of man nor beast, nor bird nor fish, in that cold scene. Polar bears and Arctic foxes, blubber-eating savages and hardy seals, had all long since passed away, even from the tropic zone.

Another lever pressed down, and the Rock of Gibraltar appeared on the disc. It rose vast and grim from the ice-arched waters of a shallow strait, with a vista of plain and mountain and glacier stretching behind it to the hazy distance — a vista of such an intolerable whiteness that the two watchers put on green spectacles to look at it. On the flat top of the Rock —which ages ago had been levelled to make it an alighting station for the Continental aerial machines — rose, gaunt and frost-encrusted, the huge skeleton framework of one of the last flying conveyances used by man.

Another lever, and Colombo, Ceylon, glared lifeless on the disc. Another, and Nagasaki, Japan, the terminal front of a vast glacier, frowned out over a black, ice-filling sea. Yet more levers, and yet more scenes; and everywhere ice and snow, and shallow, slowly-freezing seas, or countries here black and plantless, and there covered with glaciers from the crumbling hills. No sign of life, save the vestiges of man's now-ended reign, and of his long fight with the relentless cold—here ruins, on the ice-free levels, of his Cities of Heat; here gigantic moats, excavated to retard the glaciers; here canals, to connect the warmer seas; here the skeletons of huge metallic floating palaces jettisoned on some ice-bound coast; and everywhere that the ice had not overcome, the tall masts of the Pictorial Telegraph,



"THEY STOOD BEFORE A SPHERE OF BRIGHT RED METAL THAT FILLED THE GREATER PART OF THE ROOM."

sending to the watchers at Greenwich, by reflected Marconi waves, a presentment of each sight and sound impinging on the speculums and drums at their summits. And in every daylight scene, the pale ghost of a dim, red sun hung in a clear sky.

In the more northern and southern views the magnetic lights were as brilliant as ever, but there were no views of the extreme Polar Regions. These were more inaccessible than in the remote past, for there cakes and patches of liquid and semi-solid air were slowly settling and spreading on land and sea.

Yet more levers, and yet more; and the two turned away from the disc; and the room grew light again.

"It appears just as we have seen it these last two years," said the man, "yet to-day the tragedy of it appals me as it has never done before. I did not think, after all the years of expectation and mental schooling, that it would seem like this at the last. I feel tempted to do as our parents did—to seek the safety of the Ultimate Silence."

"Not that, Alwyn—not that. From generation to generation this day has been foreseen and prepared for, and we promised, after we were chosen to remain, that we would not die until all the devices of our science failed. Let us go down and get ready to leave at once."

Celia's face had a glow upon it, a glow that Alwyn's caught.

"I only said 'tempted,' Celia. Were I alone, I do not think I should break my word. And I am also curious. And the old, strange desire for life has come to me. And you are here. Let me kiss you, Celia. That . . . . at least, is not archaic."

They walked hand-in-hand to a square space marked out on the floor in a corner of the room, and one of them pressed a button on the wall. The square sank with them, lowering them into a dimmer room, where the ceaseless humming of the dynamos became a throbbing roar. They saw, with eyes long used to faint light, the four great alternators spinning round the armatures; felt the fanning of the rapid revolutions upon their faces. By the side of each machine they saw the large, queer-shaped chemical engines that drove them, that were fed from dripping vats, and from many actions and re-actions supplied the power that stood between their owners and the cold that meant the end. Coal had long been exhausted, along with peat and wood and all inflammable oils and gases; no turbines could be worked from frozen streams and seas; no air wheels would revolve in an atmosphere but slightly stirred by a faded sun. The power in chemical actions and re-actions, in transmutations and compoundings of the elements, was the last great source of power left to man in the latter days.

After a brief glance round the room, they pressed another button, and the lift went down to a still lower floor. Here a small glow-lamp was turned on, and they stood before a sphere of bright red metal that filled the greater part of the room. They had not seen this many times in their lives. Its meaning was too forcible a reminder of a prevision for the time that had at last arrived.

The Red Sphere was made of a manufactured element, unknown except within the last million years, and so costly and troublesome to produce that only two Red Spheres had ever been built. It had been made 500 years before Alwyn and Celia were born. It was made for the purpose of affording the chosen survivors of humanity a means of escaping from the earth when the chemical power proved incapable of resisting the increasing cold. In the Red Sphere Alwyn and Celia intended to leave the earth, to plunge into space—not to seek warmth and light on any other member of the Solar System, for that would be useless—but to gain the neighbourhood of some yet young and fiery star. It was a terrible undertaking—as much more terrible than mere interplanetary voyages as the attempt of a savage to cross the Atlantic in his dugout after having learned to navigate his own narrow creek. It had been left undared until the last, when, however slight the chance of life in it, the earth could only offer instead the choice of soon and certain death.

"It appears just as it did the day I first saw it and was told its purpose," said Celia, with a shudder she could not repress. "Are you sure, Alwyn, that it will carry us safely?—that you can follow out the Instructions?"

For generations the Red Sphere and all appertaining to it had been mentioned with a certain degree of awe.

"Don't trouble yourself on that point. The Instructions are simple. The necessary apparatus, and the ten years' supply of imperishable nutriment, are already inside

and fixed. We have only to subject the Red Metal to our 6,000 volt current for an hour, get inside, screw up the inlet, and cut ourselves adrift. The Red Metal, thus electrified, becomes, as you know, repulsive to gravitation, and will so continue for a year and a half. By that time, as we shall travel, according to calculation, at twice the speed of light, we should be more than half-way to one of the nearer stars, and so become subject to its gravitation. With the earth in its present position, if we start in a couple of hours, we should make F. 188, mag. 2, of the third order of spectra. Our sun, according to the records, belonged to the same order. And we know that it has at least two planets."

"But if we fall right into F. 188, instead of just missing it, as we hope? Or if we miss, but so closely as to be fused by its heat? Or if we miss it too widely and are thrown back into space on a parabolic or hyperbolic orbit? Or if we should manage the happy medium, and find there be no life, nor any chance of life, upon the planets of that system? Or if there be life, but it be hostile to us?"



"THE SPHERE ROSE THROUGH THE FALLING RUINS OF THE HOUSE AND SOARED UP INTO THE NIGHT."

"Those are the inevitable dangers of our plunge, Celia. The balance of probabilities is in favour of either the first or second of those things befalling us. But that is not the same as absolute certainty, and the improbable *may* happen."

"Quite so, Alwyn; but—do you recollect if the Instructions make any reference to these possibilities?"

"To—? Yes. There is enough fulminate of sterarium packed in the Sphere to shiver it and us to fine dust in the thousandth part of a second—if we wish. We shall always have that resource. Now I'll attach the dynamo leads to the Sphere. Get your little items of personal property together, and we shall be ready."

Celia went up the lift again, and Alwyn, after fixing the connections to several small switches on the surface of the Sphere, followed her. They sat together in the darkening twilight of the dim room above, waiting for the first hour to pass. They spoke at intervals, and in fragmentary phrases.

"It will be cold while the Sphere is being prepared," said Alwyn.

"Yes, but we shall be together, dear, as we have been so long now. I remember how miserable I felt when I first knew my destiny; but when I learned that you were chosen to share it with me, I was glad. But you were not, Alwyn—you loved Amy?"

"Yes."

"And you love her still, but you love me, too? Do you know why she was not chosen?"

"Yes; I love you, Celia, though not so much as I loved Amy. They chose you instead of her, they said, because you had a stronger will and greater physical vigour. The slight curve we shall describe on rising will bring us over the Heat-house she and her other lover retired to after the Decision, and we shall perhaps see whether they are really dead, as we believe. Amy, I remember, had an heretical turn of mind."

"If they are not dead, it is strange that they should not have answered our Marconi and telepathic messages after the first year—unless, of course, as you have so often suggested, they have retired to the interior of the other Red Sphere. How strange that it should have been left there! If they have only enough food, they may live in it till old age intervenes, secure from all the rigours that approach, but what a tame end—what a prisonment!"

"Terrible. I could not endure the Red Sphere except as we shall endure it—travelling."

So the hour passed. They switched the electric current into the framework of the vehicle that was to bear them into space. All the radiators ceased to glow and all the lights went out, leaving them, in that lower room, in absolute darkness and intense cold. They sat huddled together against the wall, where they could feel the thrill of the humming dynamos, embracing each other, silent and resolute; waiting for the end of the cold hour. They could find few words to speak now, but their thoughts were the busier.

They thought of the glorious, yet now futile past, with all its promises shattered, its ideals valueless, its hopes unfulfilled; and seemed to feel in themselves the concentration and culmination of the woes and fears of the ages. They saw, as in one long vista, the history of the millions of vanished years—"from earth's nebulous origin to its final ruin;" from its days of four hours to its days of twenty-six and a half; from its germinating specks of primal protoplasm to its last and greatest, and yet most evil creature, Man. They saw, in mental perspective, the uneven periods of human progress; the long stages of advance and retrogression, of failure and success. They saw the whole long struggle between the tendencies of Egoism and Altruism, and knew how these had merged at last into an automatic equilibration of Duty and Desire. They saw the climax of this equilibration, the Millennium of Man—and they knew how the inevitable decay had followed.

They saw how the knowledge of the sureness and nature of life's end had come to Man; slowly at first, and not influencing him much, but gaining ever more and more power as the time grew nearer and sympathy and intellect more far-sighted and acute; how, when the cold itself began, and the temperate zone grew frigid, and the tropic temperate, and Man was compelled to migrate, and his sources of heat and power failed one after the other, the knowledge of the end reacted on all forms of mental activity, throwing all thought and invention into one groove. They saw the whole course of the long fight; the ebb and flow of the struggle against the cold, in which, after each long period, it was seen that Man was the loser; how men, armed with powers that to their ancestors would have made them seem as gods, had migrated to the other planets of the system, only to find that there, even on Mercury himself, the dying sun had made all life a fore-known lost battle; how many men, whole nations, had sought a premature refuge from the Fear in the Ultimate Silence called Death. They saw how all the old beliefs, down to the tiniest shreds of mysticism, had fallen from Man as a worn-out garment, leaving him spiritually naked to face the terrors of a relentless Cosmos; how, in the slow dissolving of the ideal Future, man's duties and thoughts were once more moulded with awe and reverence to the wishes of the Past.

They saw the closing centuries of the struggle; the discovery of the Red Metal; the building of the Spheres that none dare venture to use, but which each succeeding and lessening generation handed down to the next as a sacred heritage only to be put to test in the last resort; they remembered, in their own childhood, the Conference of the Decision,

when they two had been chosen, as the only pair of sufficient vigour and health and animal courage to accept the dread legacy and dare the dread adventure of seeking a fresh home in the outer vastness, so that haply the days of Man might not be ended; and they remembered, only too well, how the rest of humanity, retiring to their last few houses, had one and all pledged each other to seek the Silence and trouble the chilly earth no more. They knew how well that pledge had been kept, and in the darkness and silence of the room clutched each other closer and closer.

And at last they heard the Time Indicator in the uppermost room ring the peal of the completed hour, and knew that in their own lives they must act the final scene in the long life-tragedy of the earth.

Alwyn's hand reached out and touched the switch, and the glow-lamp sprang into radiance again. In silence he handed Celia into the Sphere — which shone a deeper red now and coruscated strangely in the light—and then followed her, drawing the screw section in after him and making it secure. Within, the Sphere was spacious and comfortable, and, save where thickly padded, transparent, even to the weak incandescence of the lamp. It was also pleasantly warm, for the Red Metal was impervious to heat. The man's hand went to the lever that worked through the shell, and pushed aside the strong jaws of the spring clamp that held the Sphere down; and as it went, he looked into the woman's eyes. He hesitated. There was a light in her eyes and his, a feeling in her heart and his, that neither had seen nor experienced before.

"It's madness, Celia," he said, slowly. "It's not too late yet. The moment I pull this lever over the Sphere will tear its way up through the building like an air-bubble through water, but until then it is not too late."

This was not a question in phrase, but it was in fact. Celia did not answer.



"ALWYN'S HAND TOUCHED A TINY BUTTON THAT WAS EMBEDDED IN THE PADDING."

"Isn't it a miserable folly — this deference to the past? Don't we know perfectly well that death is as certain out there as here?" the man went on.

Then Celia answered: "Yes, Alwyn; Man, life, everything, is a most miserable folly. But we have nothing to do with that; we can't help it. We don't know, until we try, what fortune may yet meet us. We should be untrue to our ancestors, cowards and recreants to ourselves, if we drew back now. Even in face of the unconscious enmity of the

whole Universe of Matter, let us remember that we are living and conscious yet."

As so often in the past, the woman was the man's strengthener in the time of need. Alwyn pulled over the lever, and cried, with antique impulsiveness :—

"Forgive me, Celia! We will not give in, not even against a hostile universe! She moves!—we go!"

There was a sudden shock that threw them staggering against each other for a moment; a rending, tearing, rolling crash of masonry and metal, and the Red Sphere rose through the falling ruins of the house and soared up into the night, slanting slightly to the west as it rose. One brief glimpse they had of the dials of the Time Indicator falling across a gap of the ruin; and then their eyes were busy with the white face of earth beneath and the clear brilliance of the starry dome above.

They were still clinging to each other, when both caught sight of a small dark object approaching them from beneath. It came, apparently, from a black spot on the chill whiteness of the landscape to the west of their abandoned home, and it was travelling faster than themselves.

They gazed down at it with sudden interest, that, as they gazed, turned into acute apprehension, and then to a numb horror.

"The other Sphere!"

"Amy and her lover!"

While they spoke it grew definitely larger, and they saw that a collision was unavoidable. By what caprice of fate it had so fallen out that the helpless paths of the two Red Spheres should thus come to coincide in point of space and time, they could not imagine. The idea of leaving the earth might, by magnetic sympathy, have occurred to both couples at about the same time, but the rest of the unlucky coincidence was inexplicable. They turned from looking at the second Sphere and sought each other's eyes and hands, saying much by look and pressure that words could not convey.

"They did not mean to keep the pledge of the Decision," said Alwyn. "The desire for life must have come to them as it came to me to-day, and Amy must have remembered the Instructions. I can understand them coming up faster than us, because their Sphere was in a sheet-metal shed in the open, and so would start with less opposition and greater initial velocity. But it is strange that their path should be so nearly ours. It can only be a matter of minutes, at the rate they are gaining, before the end comes for all of us. It will be before we get through the atmosphere and gather our full speed. And it will be the end of Humanity's troubled dream . . . . . And Amy is in that. . . . . "

The thought of possible malice, impulsive or premeditated, on the part of the occupants of the second Red Sphere, never entered into the minds of those of the first.

"The responsibility of action rests upon us," said Celia. "They evidently cannot see us, against the background of the black sky. They are coming up swiftly, dear."

"It will have to be that: there is no other way. Better one than both," said the man.

"Be what, Alwyn?"

"The fulminate of sterarium."

"It will not injure them?"

"No; not if we fire the fuse within—about—three minutes. It must seem hard to you, Celia, to know that my hand will send you to the Silence so that Amy may have the last desperate chance of life. Somehow, these last few hours, I have felt the ancient emotions surging back."

The hand that clasped his gave a gentle pressure.

"And I, too, Alwyn; but their reign will be brief. I would rather die with you now than live without you. I am ready. Do not be too late with the fulminate, Alwyn."

They swayed together; their arms were about each other; their lips met in the last kiss. While their faces were yet very near, Alwyn's disengaged right hand touched a tiny white button that was embedded in the padding of the interior.

There was an instantaneous flash of light and roar of sound, and the man and woman in the second sphere were startled by the sudden glare and concussion of it, as their metal shell drove upwards through the cloud of elemental dust that was all that remained of the first Red Sphere and its occupants.

The silence and clear darkness that had been round them a moment before, had returned when they recovered their balance; and in that silence and clear darkness, the man and woman who had not been chosen passed out into the abyss of the Beyond, ignorant of the cause and meaning of that strange explosion in the air, and knew that they were alone in Space, bound they knew not whither.



ANEMONE & CORALINE

A STORY FOR CHILDREN.

By Geo. A. Best.

Illustrated by Walter R. Booth.

TWO very pretty mermaids sat side by side on a rocky seat in the Royal Seaweed Park of Ultramarine. There was not a dry spot to be found anywhere, either in the town itself or in the pleasure grounds which surrounded it; for Ultramarine lies at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean, at its deepest part. It is, therefore, a very damp and chilly place for ordinary people, although the mermaids and mermen who live in the town and its suburbs enjoy the very best of health.

One of the mermaids already mentioned was reading a waterproof novel, bound in sharkskin, and entitled "Miss Turbot's Tail." Her companion was more industriously engaged in the manufacture of a fancy seaweed basket for sale at a charity bazaar, which was shortly to be held in the Town Hall.

"Dear me!" sighed the first mermaid, looking up from her book, and yawning so widely that a baby shrimp darted into her mouth ere she could place her tiny white hand before it. "Dear me! What a stupidly dull town this is, to be sure."

The other mermaid whisked her tail with a quick gesture of disapproval.

"I am sure it's a very pretty place, Coraline, dear," she said gently. "The seaweed forests are lovely; and the streets are of beautifully firm sand, which is much cleaner and healthier than deep sea mud. What else do you wish for?"

"Life, bustle, excitement!" was the impatient reply. "Something to look at beyond a stupid forest of pink seaweed and a sandy street without a single shop in it; something to wear besides a shell necklet and a mother-of-pearl locket."

"You are forgetting your engagement ring, Coraline," said the other. "You are far better off for clothing than I am, for I haven't even a shell necklet!"

"Clothing!" snapped Coraline. "I don't call rings, and necklets, and lockets clothing! I mean mantles, and hats, and smart jackets, such as are worn by the air-breathing people, and by a small proportion of our own folks in the larger towns of the Submarine. Hats and jackets are often to be found in the cabins of sunken wrecks, Anemone."

The little sea lady addressed as Anemone laughed merrily.

"I once saw a mermaid dressed in a waterproof cloak and a bonnet, and she looked a perfect fright!" she remarked. "And the silly little merman who accompanied her wore a tall black hat almost as big as his head, and a long coat which reached from his shoulders right down to his tail; each of them carried a tiny black tent, which they held over their heads, in



ONE OF THE MERMAIDS WAS READING A WATERPROOF NOVEL, BOUND IN SHARKSKIN.

exactly the same manner as the land folk do when it rains. It was really one of the funniest sights in the world! I'm sure your sweetheart, Mr. Sea Kale, wouldn't care to see his lady love dressed up in that hideous fashion, Coraline."

"How do *you* know what Sea Kale likes, or what he doesn't like?" demanded Coraline, angrily.

Anemone bent her head still lower over her seaweed basket.

"You forget that he loved *me* once," she said, with a pitiful shake in her voice. "But that was long ago," she added, more firmly, "before he met you."

Coraline laughed cruelly.

"You are such a simple little thing," she remarked, rather contemptuously. "You are actually content to live in a middle-class cave, and to spend your time in making silly seaweed baskets for poor people, instead of trying to improve your manners and expanding your mind by means of travel, as I have done. I don't think you've ever swum more than twenty knots away from Ultramarine in your life!" she concluded, scornfully.

"Well, that's a pretty long swim for a maiden, isn't it?" asked Anemone, innocently.

"A pretty long swim, indeed!" repeated the other, jeeringly. "Why I swam round to the Mediterranean last summer and watched the people bathing in the shallow water of the bays. It was one of the funniest sights I ever witnessed. The ladies screamed loudly as soon as their little white feet touched the water, and the gentlemen dived down a few feet into the sea, and returned to the surface gasping like so many dying salmon! Yet all the bathers pretended that they were enjoying themselves!"

"What else did you see, Coraline?" asked Anemone, who was greatly interested in the strange manners and customs of the land folk.

"I peeped out into the daylight near one of the piers, and saw no less than fifty solemn-looking creatures all standing in a row, with long lines in their hands. They were actually trying to catch fish, Anemone! I saw a poor little infant whiting swallow the worm which was tied on the submerged end of one of the lines, and in another moment

he was jerked into daylight, and lay gasping and struggling on the pier. Then all the other fishermen gathered around the tiny fish, and made as much fuss as if they had landed a sea serpent! So while all this excitement and commotion was going on above, I dived down to the sandy bottom and tied every one of their fifty fishing-lines together!"

"What happened then?" asked Anemone, breathlessly.

"I left the spot as quickly as possible after I had seen a great crowd of angry fishermen struggling with a hundred fathoms of tangled cord, and calling each other the most horrible names I've ever heard," replied Coraline, with a merry laugh. "On the same day I visited one of the Mediterranean deep-sea bazaars, and bought myself a marine bicycle, with two giant oyster shells for wheels. It is really a beautiful machine, Anemone, with best conger eel tyres, and a framework of real Whitby jet. But I must say good-bye now," she concluded, hastily. "I promised to meet Sea Kale at five o'clock, and he doesn't like to be kept waiting."

So Coraline swam rapidly away in the direction of the Seaweed Forest, and little Anemone returned home to one of the smallest caves of Ultramarine.

But although Anemone's cavern was very tiny, it was prettily furnished with a mother-of-pearl table and two chairs of the finest pink coral. A beautiful harp, which had been recovered from a sunken wreck years ago, stood in the corner; and on this instrument Anemone was wont to play the accompaniments to several very pretty songs, which she herself had composed. So while Coraline was swimming through the forest with fickle Mr. Sea Kale, her humble little friend sat in her lonely home and sang the song which pleased her most:—

In a pretty little village,
  At the bottom of the sea,
There dwelt a handsome merman,
  Who was very fond of me,
Till he met another maiden,
  With a salmon-coloured tail,
Who is highly educated
  And can read the *Ocean Mail*.

She can ride upon a cycle,
  With giant oyster wheels;
She can flounder on a sand-bank,
  And tell you how it feels;
She can entertain the mermen,
  And invite their wives to tea,
In a cave of seven stories,
  At the bottom of the sea.



TIED EVERY ONE OF THEIR FISHING LINES TOGETHER.

I have never seen a city
  Of the mighty Submarine;
And when people speak of 'fashions,'
  I don't know what they mean!
So I'm but a simple mermaid,
  Who can never understand
Why girls wear shoes and stockings
  To walk about on land.

I cannot read a novel,
  By the Dickens of the deep;
Or play a weird sonata,
  To lull my friends to sleep;
I cannot trim a bonnet,
  Or button up a glove;
The only thing I've practised
  Is simply how to love!

Anemone had scarcely finished her song before the cavern became suddenly dark, as though night had already descended and extinguished the last of the sunlit ripples on the transparent roof of the Submarine.

"This is very extraordinary," murmured our little mermaid, switching on the phosphorescent light to a crystal lamp which hung from the rocky ceiling of the cavern. "A minute ago there was bright sunshine above, and now it's just as black as the darkest of nights! Perhaps there's a big vessel passing over the town, and if that is the case the light from the silver ripples will come back just as quickly as it went away."

But the light did not return for quite a long time, for a great iron ship was slowly sinking down to its last resting-place in the Royal Seaweed Park of Ultramarine. And as the huge hull of the vessel sank lower and lower into the depths of the ocean, the mermen and maids sought the shelter of their caves with all possible speed, for they knew not the meaning of that great black cloud which was descending on the town. Then the shadow passed, like a giant phantom, slowly and silently downward until it fell with a crash on to the slender branches of the coral forest in the deepest valley of the Park; and for a while the inhabitants of Ultramarine swam about helplessly and blindly, for the usually clear water was now black with deep sea mud, which had been disturbed by the sunken wreck. And strange marine creatures, which had dwelt for centuries in the green depths of the coral forest, rose in shoals towards the higher streets of the town and crawled into the caves of the terrified people. These dreadful monsters became visible when the sunlight had again reached the darkened city, and many a handsome merman was badly wounded during an encounter with a giant crab or sea spider which had taken possession of his home while the waters within were still black with drifting ooze from the deep valley.



BOUGHT A MARINE BICYCLE WITH TWO GIANT OYSTER SHELLS FOR WHEELS.

It was a terrible day for the tiny townsfolk of Ultramarine: but when the dark waters had cleared, and the last of the intruders had been expelled, terror gave place to great

rejoicing and gladness, for a sunken wreck in any one of the towns of the Submarine gives to the inhabitants a long period of prosperity and importance, which can never be enjoyed by the less fortunate citizens of the deep sea.

The vessel which Ultramarine claimed as its own contained scores of tiny cabins, and a grand saloon which was beautifully furnished with long tables and swivel chairs, and lounges richly upholstered in red velvet. So the saloon of the ill-fated steamship *Spray*, of London, became the concert hall and theatre of the mermaids of Ultramarine, and the smaller cabins were quickly transformed into dwelling houses for the richer inhabitants of the town, while the poorer people built houses for themselves, in the neighbourhood of the vessel, from the tons of coal which the hull contained. So for many weeks the residents of the town were busily engaged in building, decorating and furniture removing, and a huge coal cathedral was erected by the city architect and his assistants.

But in the midst of this excitement little Anemone dwelt in her tiny cave, which, in her eyes, was much more beautiful than a villa of coal or a mansion of rusty iron. Only yesterday she had seen some giddy young mermaids swim past dressed in the strange garments of the land dwellers, which had been found in the sunken wreck. Her friend, Coraline, was among them, and she wore a bright green blouse and a heavily-beaded skirt which completely hid the salmon-coloured tail so much admired by her sweetheart, Sea Kale.

"It is all so strange and so ugly," Anemone murmured—"the rusty old ship, and the coal houses, and the stiff dresses which were never made for water wear. Perhaps I'm out of date, but for me there is now nothing pretty left in Ultramarine."

And, with a deep sigh, Anemone struck a chord on her harp and sang :—

In a pretty little village,
At the bottom of the sea,
There dwelt a handsome merman,
Who was very fond of me,
Till he met another maiden
With a salmon coloured—

"And who was the handsome merman?" interrupted a voice at this moment.

Anemone blushed right to the roots of her lovely black hair, for the speaker was none other than Sea Kale himself.

"I'm sorry to interrupt the song, Anemone," he said, entering the cavern and seating himself upon a water-worn chair,



ANEMONE STRUCK A CHORD ON HER HARP AND SANG.

"but I am very curious to know the name of the handsome merman to whom you refer. Won't you tell me?"

"I meant you, of course," said Anemone, who was never ashamed of speaking the truth.

"But I am no longer considered handsome in these days," said Sea Kale bitterly. "The handsome mermen are those who dress up in hats and coats made for land people — old-fashioned folk, like myself, haven't a chance now-a-days. I am leaving Ultramarine to-night, and I shall never return."

"And Coraline? Is she going, too?" faltered Anemone.

"Coraline declares that she won't leave the town for all the stupid old Sea Kales

in the Submarine!" replied the merman sorrowfully. "Those were her very words, Anemone; and she's dressed up in an ugly costume of wet rags at this moment!"

Sea Kale lashed his tail so furiously at the remembrance of Coraline's rudeness that the roof of the cavern was white with foam.

"Don't you like fashionable mermaids, then?" asked Anemone softly.

"Like them!" thundered Sea Kale. "Why I can't bear the sight of them! I'd rather marry a decent-minded oyster any day."

"Is Coraline sorry to lose you?" asked Anemone gently.

"Not at all, Anemone," answered Sea Kale with something like a sob in his voice. "As a matter of fact, we've had a quarrel just because I wouldn't wear a stupid jacket to play tennis in! She said I ought to be ashamed of myself for going about like a sea savage, when I might have a dozen suits of clothes simply for the asking. Then I lost my temper and called Coraline a fright, and she flew into an awful rage and called me



SWAM AWAY, HAND IN HAND, TO FIND A NEW HOME.

Anemone laughed heartily. She felt brighter and happier than she had done for many a long day.

"The town isn't fit for even a respectable porpoise to live in," continued Sea Kale; "in fact, one seldom meets any of the better class of fish in the streets now-a-days; it's quite a hard matter to find a dogfish to do my retrieving for me when I'm out for a day's shark shooting. And now that sea tennis is all the rage in the Royal Park, even the whiting and herrings are fighting shy of the place, because they so often become entangled in the nets. This is what they call civilisation and progress!"

an Atlantic ass (whatever that may mean). I said 'All is over between us,' and she answered 'A very good thing, too!' So I swam away to find the only really good little mermaid left in Ultramarine."

"Did you succeed?" asked Anemone.

"Fortunately, she has not left the town yet, but I believe she will to-night, if I ask her," was the softly-whispered answer.

And the same evening Anemone and Sea Kale swam, hand in hand, past the windows of the brilliantly-lighted saloon of the sunken *Spray*, and then away into the darker waters beyond to find a new home in the lonely waters of the Western Atlantic.

THE HAUNTED CHAIR

THE STORY OF A STRANGE MYSTERY.



TOLD BY RICHARD MARSH.

Illustrated by H. H. Flere.

I.

"WELL, that's the most staggering thing I've ever known!"

As Mr. Philpotts entered the smoking-room, these were the words—with additions—which fell upon his, not unnaturally, startled ears. Since Mr. Bloxham was the only person in the room, it seemed only too probable that the extraordinary language had been uttered by him—and, indeed, his demeanour went far to confirm the probability. He was standing in front of his chair, staring about him in a manner which suggested considerable mental perturbation, apparently unconscious of the fact that his cigar had dropped either from his lips or his fingers and was smoking merrily away on the brand-new carpet which the committee had just laid down. He turned to Mr. Philpotts in a state of what seemed really curious agitation.

"I say, Philpotts, did you see him?"

Mr. Philpotts looked at him in silence for a moment, before he drily said, "I heard you."

But Mr. Bloxham was in no mood to be put off in this manner. He seemed, for some cause, to have lost the air of serene indifference for which he was famed—he was in a state of excitement, which, for him, was quite phenomenal.

"No nonsense, Philpotts—did you see him?"

"See whom?" Mr. Philpotts was selecting a paper from a side table. "I see your cigar is burning a hole in the carpet."

"Confound my cigar!" Mr. Bloxham stamped on it with an angry tread. "Did Geoff Fleming pass you as you came in?"

Mr. Philpotts looked round with an air of evident surprise.

"Geoff Fleming!—Why, surely, he's in Ceylon by now."

"Not a bit of it. A minute ago he was in that chair talking to me."

"Bloxham!" Mr. Philpotts' air of surprise became distinctly more pronounced, a fact which Mr. Bloxham apparently resented.

"What are you looking at me like that for, pray? I tell you I was glancing through the *Field*, when I felt someone touch me on the shoulder. I looked round—there was Fleming standing just behind me. 'Geoff,' I cried, 'I thought you were on the other side of the world—what are you doing here?' 'I've come to have a peep at you,' he said. He drew a chair up close to mine—this chair—and sat in it. I turned round to reach for a match on the table, it scarcely took me a second, but when I looked his way again hanged if he weren't gone."

Mr. Philpotts continued his selection of a paper—in a manner which was rather marked.

"Which way did he go?"

"Didn't you meet him as you came in?"

"I did not—I met no one. What's the matter now?"

The question was inspired by the fact

that a fresh volley of expletives came from Mr. Bloxham's lips. That gentleman was standing with his hands thrust deep into his trouser pockets, his legs wide open, and his eyes and mouth almost as wide open as his legs.

"Hang me," he exclaimed, when, as it appeared, he had temporarily come to the end of his stock of adjectives, "if I don't believe he's boned my purse."

"Boned your purse!" Mr. Philpotts laid a not altogether flattering emphasis upon the "boned!" "Bloxham! What do you mean?"

Mr. Bloxham did not immediately explain. He dropped into the chair behind him. His hands were still in his trouser pockets, his legs were stretched out in front of him, and on his face there was not only an expression of amazement, but also of the most unequivocal bewilderment. He was staring at the vacant air as if he were trying his hardest to read some riddle.

"This is a queer start, upon my word, Philpotts," he spoke in what, for him, were tones of unwonted earnestness. "When I was reaching for the matches on the table, what made me turn round so suddenly was because I thought I felt someone tugging at my purse—it was in the pocket next to Fleming. As I told you, when I did turn round Fleming was gone—and, by Jove, it looks as though my purse went with him."

"Have you lost your purse?—is that what you mean?"

"I'll swear that it was in my pocket five minutes ago, and that it's not there now; that's what I mean."

Mr. Philpotts looked at Mr. Bloxham as if, although he was too polite to say so, he could not make him out at all. He resumed his selection of a paper.

"One is liable to make mistakes about one's purse; perhaps you'll find it when you get home."

Mr. Bloxham sat in silence for some moments. Then, rising, he shook himself as a dog does when it quits the water.

"I say, Philpotts, don't ladle out this yarn of mine to the other fellows, there's a good chap. As you say, one is apt to get into a muddle about one's purse, and I dare say I shall come across it when I get home. And perhaps I'm not very well this afternoon; I am feeling out of sorts, and that's a fact. I think I'll just toddle home and take a seidlitz, or a pill, or something. Ta ta!"

When Mr. Philpotts was left alone he smiled to himself, that superior smile which we are apt to smile when conscious that a man has been making a conspicuous ass of himself on lines which may be his, but which, we thank Providence, are emphatically not ours. With not one, but half a dozen papers in his hand, he seated himself in the chair which Mr. Bloxham had recently relinquished. Retaining a single paper, he placed the rest on the small round table on his left—the table on which were the matches for which Mr. Bloxham declared he had reached. Taking out his case, he selected a cigar almost with the same care which he had shewn in selecting his literature, smiling to himself all the time that superior smile. Lighting the cigar he had chosen with a match from the table, he settled himself at his ease to read.

Scarcely had he done so than he was conscious of a hand laid gently on his shoulder from behind.

"What! back again?"

"Hullo, Phil!"

He had taken it for granted, without troubling to look round, that Mr. Bloxham had returned, and that it was he who touched him on the shoulder. But the voice which replied to him, so far from being Mr. Bloxham's, was one the mere sound of which caused him not only to lose his bearing of indifference but to spring from his seat with the agility almost of a jack-in-the-box. When he saw who it was had touched him on the shoulder, he stared.

"Fleming! Then Bloxham was right, after all. May I ask what brings you here?"

The man at whom he was looking was tall and well-built, in age about five and thirty. There were black cavities beneath his eyes; the man's whole face was redolent, to a trained perception, of something which was, at least, slightly unsavoury. He was dressed from head to foot in white duck—a somewhat singular costume for Pall Mall, even on a summer afternoon.

Before Mr. Philpotts' gaze, his own eyes sank. Murmuring something which was almost inaudible, he moved to the chair next to the one which Mr. Philpotts had been occupying, the chair of which Mr. Bloxham had spoken.

As he seated himself, Mr. Philpotts eyed him in a fashion which was certainly not too friendly.

"What did you mean by disappearing

just now in that extraordinary manner, frightening Bloxham half out of his wits? Where did you get to?"

The new comer was stroking his heavy moustache with a hand which, for a man of his size and build, was unusually small and white. He spoke in a lazy, almost inaudible, drawl.

"I just popped outside."

"Just popped outside! I must have been coming in just when you went out. I saw nothing of you; you've put Bloxham into a pretty state of mind."

Re-seating himself, Mr. Philpotts turned to put the paper he was holding on to the little table. "I don't want to make myself a brute, but it strikes me that your presence here at all requires explanation. When several fellows club together to give another fellow a fresh start on the other side of the world——"



"I FELT SOMEONE TOUCH ME ON THE SHOULDER. I LOOKED ROUND—THERE WAS FLEMING."

Mr. Philpotts stopped short. Having settled the paper on the table to his perfect satisfaction, he turned round again towards the man he was addressing—and as he did so he ceased to address him, and that for the sufficiently simple reason that he was not there to address—the man had gone! The chair at Mr. Philpotts' side was empty; without a sign or a sound its occupant had vanished, it would almost seem, into space.

II.

Under the really remarkable circumstances of the case, Mr. Philpotts preserved his composure to a singular degree. He looked round the room; there was no one there. He again fixedly regarded the chair at his side; there could be no doubt that it was empty. To make quite sure, he passed his hand two or three times over the seat; it met with not the slightest opposition. Where could the man have got to? Mr. Philpotts had not, consciously, heard the slightest sound; there had not been time for him to have reached the door. Mr. Philpotts knocked the ash off his cigar. He stood up. He paced leisurely two or three times up and down the room.

"If Bloxham is ill, I am not. I was never better in my life. And the man who tells me that I have been the victim of an optical delusion is talking of what he knows nothing. I am prepared to swear that it was Geoffrey Fleming who touched me on the shoulder; that he spoke to me; and that he seated himself upon that chair. Where he came from, or where he has gone to, are other questions entirely." He critically examined his finger nails.

"If those Psychical Research people have an address in town, I think I'll have a talk with them. I suppose it's three or four minutes since the man vanished. What's

the time now? Whatever has become of my watch?"

He might well ask—it had gone, both watch and chain—vanished, with Mr. Fleming, into air. Mr. Philpotts stared at his waistcoat, too astonished for speech. Then he gave a little gasp.

"This comes of playing Didymus! The brute has stolen it! I must apologise to Bloxham. As he himself said, this is a queer start, upon my honour! Now, if you like, I do feel a little out of sorts; this sort of thing is enough to make one. Before I go, I think I'll have a drop of brandy."

As he was hesitating, the smoking-room door opened to admit Frank Osborne. Mr. Osborne nodded to Mr. Philpotts as he crossed the room.

"You're not looking quite yourself, Philpotts."

Mr. Philpotts seemed to regard the observation almost in the light of an impertinence.

"Am I not? I was not aware that there was anything in my appearance to call for remark." Smiling, Mr. Osborne seated himself in the chair which the other had not long ago vacated. Mr. Philpotts regarded him attentively. "You're not looking quite yourself, either."

The smile vanished from Mr. Osborne's face.

"I'm not feeling myself!—I'm not! I'm worried about Geoff Fleming."

Mr. Philpotts slightly started.

"About Geoff Fleming?—what about Fleming?"

"I'm afraid—well, Phil, the truth is that I'm afraid that Geoff's a hopeless case."

Mr. Philpotts was once more busying himself with the papers which were on the side table.

"What do you mean?"

"As you know, he and I have been very thick in our time, and when he came a cropper it was I who suggested that we who were at school with him might have a whip round among ourselves to get the old chap a fresh start elsewhere. You all of you behaved like bricks, and when I told him what you had done, poor Geoff was quite knocked over. He promised voluntarily that he would never touch a card again, or make another bet, until he had paid you fellows off with thumping interest. Well, he doesn't seem to have kept his promise long."

"How do you know he hasn't?"

"I've heard from Deecie."

"From Deecie?—where's Fleming?"

"In Ceylon—they'd both got there before Deecie's letter left."

"In Ceylon!" exclaimed Mr. Philpotts excitedly, staring hard at Mr. Osborne. "You are sure he isn't back in town?"

In his turn, Mr. Osborne was staring at Mr. Philpotts.

"Not unless he came back by the same boat which brought Deecie's letter. What makes you ask?"

"I only wondered."

Mr. Philpotts turned again to the paper. The other went on.

"It seems that a lot of Australian sporting men were on the boat on which they went out. Fleming got in with them. They played—he played, too. Deecie remonstrated—but he says that it only seemed to make bad worse. At first Geoff won—you know the usual sort of thing; he wound up by losing all he had, and about four hundred pounds beside. He had the cheek to ask Deecie for the money." Mr. Osborne paused. Mr. Philpotts uttered a sound which might have been indicative of contempt—or anything. "Deecie says that when the winners found out that he couldn't pay, there was a regular row. Geoff swore, in that wild way of his, that if he couldn't pay them before he died, he would rise from the dead to get the money."

Mr. Philpotts looked round with a show of added interest.

"What was that he said?"

"Oh, it was only his wild way of speaking—you know that way of his. If they don't get their money before he dies, and I fancy that it's rather more than even betting that they won't, I don't think that there's much chance of his rising from his grave to get it for them. He'll break that promise, as he has broken so many more. Poor Geoff! It seems that we might as well have kept our money in our pockets; it doesn't seem to have done him much good. His prospects don't look very rosy—without money, and with a bad name to start with."

"As I fancy you have more than once suspected, Frank, I never have had a high opinion of Mr. Geoffrey Fleming. I am not in the least surprised at what you tell me, any more than I was surprised when he came his cropper. I have always felt that, at a pinch, he would do anything to save his own skin." Mr. Osborne said

nothing, but he shook his head. "Did you see anything of Bloxham when you came in?"

"I saw him going along the street in a cab."

"I want to speak to him; I think I'll just go and see if I can find him in his rooms."

III.

Mr. Frank Osborne scarcely seemed to be enjoying his own society when Mr. Philpotts had left him. As all the world knows, he is a man of sentiment—of the true sort, not the false. He has had one great passion in his life — Geoffrey Fleming. They began when they were at Chilchester together, when he was big, and Fleming still little. He did his work for him, fought for him, took his scrapes upon himself, believed in him, almost worshipped him. The thing continued when Fleming joined him at the University. Perhaps the fact that they both were orphans had something to do with it; neither of them had kith nor kin. The odd part of the business was that Osborne was not only a clear-sighted, he was a hard-headed, man. It could not have been long before it dawned upon him that the man with whom he fraternised was a naturally bad egg. Fleming was continually coming to grief; he would have come to eternal grief at the very commencement of his career if it had not been for Osborne at his back. He went through his own money; he went through as much of his friend's as his friend would let him. Then came the final smash. There were features about the thing which made it clear, even to Frank Osborne, that in England, at least, for some years to come, Geoffrey Fleming had run his course right out. He strained all his already strained resources in his efforts to extricate the man from the mire. When he found that he himself was insufficient, going to his old schoolfellows, he begged them, for his sake—if not for Fleming's—to join hands with him in giving the scapegrace still another start. As

"GEOFF SWORE, IN THAT WILD WAY OF HIS, THAT IF HE COULDN'T PAY THEM BEFORE HE DIED, HE WOULD RISE FROM THE DEAD TO GET THE MONEY."



a result, interest was made for him in a Ceylon plantation, and Mr. Fleming with, under the circumstances, well-lined pockets, was despatched over the seas to turn over a new leaf in a sunnier clime.

How he had vowed that he would turn over a new leaf, actually with tears, upon his knees! And this was how he had done it: before he had reached his journey's end, he had gambled away the money which



FORCING HIM BACKWARDS, BEGAN TO RIFLE THE POCKET WHICH CONTAINED THE SEVENTY POUNDS.

was not his, and was in debt besides. Frank Osborne must have been fashioned something like the dog which loves its master the more, the more he illtreats it. His heart went out in pity to the scamp across the seas. He had no delusions; he had long been conscious that the man was hopeless. And yet he knew very well that if he could have had his way he would have gone at once to comfort him. Poor Geoff! What an all-round mess he seemed to have made of things—and he had had the ball at his feet when he started—poor, dear old Geoff! With his knuckles Mr. Osborne wiped a suspicious moisture from his eyes. Geoff was all right—if he had only been able to prevent money from slipping from between his fingers, and been gifted with a sense of *meum et tuum*—not a nicer fellow in the world!

Mr. Osborne sat trying to persuade himself into the belief that the man was an injured paragon, though he knew very well that he was an irredeemable scamp. He endeavoured to see only his good qualities, which was a task of exceeding difficulty—they were hidden in such a cloud of blackness. At least, whatever might be said against Geoff—and Mr. Osborne admitted to himself that there might be something—it was certain that Geoff loved him almost as much as he loved Geoff. Mr. Osborne declared to himself — putting pressure on himself to prevent his making a single mental reservation — that Geoff Fleming, in spite of all his faults, was the only person in the wide, wide world who did love him. And he was a stranger in a strange land, and in trouble again—poor, dear old Geoff! Once more Mr. Osborne's knuckles went up to wipe that suspicious moisture from his eyes.

While he was engaged in doing this, a hand was laid gently on his shoulder from behind. It was, perhaps, because he was unwilling to be detected in such an act that, at the touch, he rose from his seat with a start — which became, so to speak, a start of petrified amazement when he perceived who it was who had touched him. It was the man of whom he had been thinking, the friend of his boyhood—Geoffrey Fleming.

"Geoff!" he gasped. "Dear old Geoff!"

He paused, seemingly in doubt whether to laugh or cry. "I thought you were in Ceylon!"

Mr. Fleming did exactly what he had done when he came so unexpectedly on Mr. Philpotts—he moved to the chair at Mr. Osborne's side. His manner was in striking contrast to his friend's — it was emphatically not emotional.

"I've just dropped in," he drawled.

"My dear old boy!" Mr. Osborne, as he surveyed his friend, seemed to become more and more torn by conflicting emotions. "Of course I'm very glad to see you, Geoff, but—how did you get in here? I thought that they had taken your name off the books of the club." He was perfectly aware that Mr. Fleming's name had been taken off the books of the club, and in a manner the reverse of complimentary. Mr. Fleming offered no remark. He sat looking down at the carpet, stroking his moustache. Mr. Osborne went stammeringly on—

"As I say, Geoff—and as, of course, you know—I am very glad to see you, anywhere; but — we don't want any unpleasantness, do we? If some of the fellows came in and found you here, they might make themselves nasty. Come round to my rooms; we shall be a lot more comfortable there, old man."

Mr. Fleming raised his eyes. He looked his friend full in the face. As he met his glance, Mr. Osborne was conscious of a curious sort of shiver. It was not only because the man's glance was, to say the least, less friendly than it might have been—it was because of something else, something which Mr. Osborne could scarcely have defined.

"I want some money."

Mr. Osborne smiled, rather fatuously.

"Ah, Geoff, the same old tale! Deecie has told me all about it. I won't reproach you; you know, if I had some, you should have it; but I'm not sure that it isn't just as well for both ourselves that I haven't, Geoff."

"You have some money in your pocket now."

Mr. Osborne's amazement grew apace—his friend's manner was so very strange.

"What a nose you always have for money; however did you find that out? But it isn't mine. You know Jim Baker left me guardian to that boy of his, and I've been drawing the youngster's dividends—it's only seventy pounds, Geoff."

Mr. Fleming stretched out his hand—his reply was brief, and to the point.

"Give it to me!"

"Give it to you!—Geoff!—young Baker's money!"

Mr. Fleming reiterated his demand.

"Give it to me!"

His manner was not only distinctly threatening, it had a peculiar effect upon his friend. Although Mr. Osborne had never before shewn fear of any living man, and had, in that respect, proved his superiority over Fleming many a time, there was something at that moment in the speaker's voice, or words, or bearing, or in all three together, which set him shivering, as if with fear, from head to foot.

"Geoff!—you are mad! I'll see what I can find for you, but I can't give you young Baker's dividends."

Mr. Osborne was not quite clear as to exactly what it was that happened. He only knew that the friend of his boyhood—the man for whom he had done so much—the only person in the world who loved him—rose and took him by the throat, and, forcing him backwards, began to rifle the pocket which contained the seventy pounds. He was so taken by surprise, so overwhelmed by a feeling of utter horror, against which he was unable even to struggle, that it was only when he felt the money being actually withdrawn from his pocket that he made an attempt at self-defence. Then, when he made a frantic clutch at his assailant's felonious arm, all he succeeded in grasping was the empty air. The pressure was removed from his throat. He was able to look about him. Mr. Fleming was gone. He thrust a trembling hand into his pocket—the seventy pounds had vanished, too.

"Geoff! Geoff!" he cried, the tears streaming from his eyes. "Don't play tricks with me! Give me back young Baker's dividends!"

When no one answered and there seemed no one to hear, he began searching round and round the room with his eyes, as if he suspected Mr. Fleming of concealing himself behind some article of furniture.

"Geoff! Geoff!" he continued crying. "Dear old boy!—give me back young Baker's dividends!"

"Hullo!" exclaimed a voice—which certainly was not Mr. Fleming's. Mr. Osborne turned, Colonel Lanyon was

standing with the handle of the open door in his hand. "Frank, are you rehearsing for a five-act tragedy?"

Mr. Osborne replied to the Colonel's question with another.

"Lanyon, did Geoffrey Fleming pass you as you came in?"

"Geoffrey Fleming!" The Colonel wheeled round on his heels like a teetotum. He glanced behind him. "What the deuce do you mean, Frank? If I catch that thief under the roof which covers me, I'll make a case for the police of him."

Then Mr. Osborne remembered what, in his agitation, he had momentarily forgotten, that Geoffrey Fleming had had no bitterer, more outspoken, and, it may be added, more well-merited an opponent than Colonel Lanyon in the Climax Club. The Colonel advanced towards Mr. Osborne.

"Do you know that that's the blackguard's chair you're standing by?"

"His chair!"

Mr. Osborne was leaning with one hand on the chair on which Mr. Fleming had, not long ago, been sitting.

"That's what he used to call it himself, —with his usual impudence. He used to sit in it whenever he took a hand. The men would give it up to him—you know how you gave everything up to him, all the lot of you. If he couldn't get it he'd turn nasty—wouldn't play. It seems that he bad the cheek to cut his initials on the chair—I only heard of it the other day, or there'd have been a clearance of him long ago. Look here—what do you think of that for a piece of rowdiness?"

The Colonel turned the chair upside down. Sure enough, in the woodwork underneath the seat were the letters, cut in good-sized characters—"G. F."

"You know that rubbishing way in which he used to talk. When men questioned his exclusive right to the chair, I've heard him say he'd prove his right by coming and sitting in it after he was dead and buried—he swore he'd haunt the chair. Idiot!—What is the matter with you Frank? You look as if you'd been in a rough and tumble —your necktie's all anyhow."

"I think I must have dropped asleep, and dreamed—yes, I fancy I've been dreaming."

Mr. Osborne staggered, rather than walked, to the door, keeping one hand in the inside pocket of his coat. The Colonel followed him with his eyes.

"Frank's ageing fast," was his mental comment as Mr. Osborne disappeared. "He'll be an old man yet before I am."

He seated himself in Geoffrey Fleming's chair.

It was, perhaps, ten minutes afterwards that Edward Jackson went into the smoking-room—"Scientific" Jackson, as they call him, because of the sort of catch phrase he is always using—"Give me science!" He had scarcely been in the room a minute before he came rushing to the door shouting—

"Help, help!"

Men came hurrying from all parts of the building. Mr. Griffin came from the billiard-room, where he is always to be found. He had a cue in one hand, and a piece of chalk in the other. He was the first to address the vociferous gentleman standing at the smoking-room door.

"Jackson!— What's the matter?"

Mr. Jackson was in such a condition of fluster and excitement that it was a little difficult to make out, from his own statement, what was the matter.

"Lanyon's dead! Have any of you seen Geoff Fleming? Stop him if you do—he's stolen my pocket-book!" He began mopping his brow with his bandanna handkerchief. "God bless my soul! an awful thing!—I've been robbed—and old Lanyon's dead!"

One thing was quickly made clear—as they saw for themselves when they went crowding into the smoking-room—Lanyon was dead. He was kneeling in front of Geoffrey Fleming's chair, clutching at either side of it with a tenacity which suggested some sort of convulsion. His head was thrown back, his eyes were still staring wide open, his face was distorted by a something which was half fear, half horror—as if, as those who saw him afterwards agreed, he had seen sudden, certain death approaching him, in a form which even he, a seasoned soldier, had found too horrible for contemplation.

Mr. Jackson's story, in one sense, was plain enough, though it was odd enough in another. He told it to an audience which evinced unmistakable interest in every word uttered.

"I often come in for a smoke about this time, because generally the place is empty, so that you get it all to yourself."

He cast a somewhat aggressive look upon his hearers—a look which could hardly be said to convey a flattering suggestion.

"When I first came in I thought that the room was empty. It was only when I was half-way across that something caused me to look round. I saw that someone was kneeling on the floor. I looked to see who it was. It was Lanyon. 'Lanyon!' I cried. 'Whatever are you doing there?' He didn't answer. Wondering what was up with him and why he didn't speak, I went closer to where he was. When I got there I didn't like the look of him at all. I thought he was in some sort of a fit. I was hesitating whether to pick him up, or at once to summon assistance, when—"

Mr. Jackson paused. He looked about him with an obvious shiver.

"By George! when I think of it now, it makes me go quite creepy. Cathcart, would you mind ringing for another drop of brandy?"

The brandy was rung for. Mr. Jackson went on.

"All of a sudden, as I was stooping over Lanyon, someone touched me on the shoulder. You know, there hadn't been a sound—I hadn't heard the door open, not a thing which could suggest that anyone was approaching. Finding Lanyon like that had made me go quite queer, and when I felt that touch on my shoulder it so startled me that I fairly screeched. I jumped up to see who it was. And when I saw"—Mr. Jackson's bandanna came into play—"who it was, I thought my eyes would have started out of my head. It was Geoff Fleming."



HE WAS KNEELING IN FRONT OF GEOFFREY FLEMING'S CHAIR . . . DEAD.

"Who?" came in chorus from his auditors.

"It was Geoffrey Fleming. 'Good God! —Fleming!' I cried. 'Where did you come from? I never heard you. Anyhow, you're just in the nick of time. Lanyon's come to grief—lend me a hand with him.' I bent down, to take hold of one side of poor old Lanyon, meaning Fleming to take hold of the other. Before I had a chance of touching Lanyon, Fleming, catching me by the shoulder, whirled me round—I had had no idea the fellow was so strong, he gripped me like a vice. I was just going to ask what the dickens he meant by handling me like that, when, before I could say Jack Robinson, or even had time to get my mouth open, Fleming, darting his hand into my coat pocket, snatched my pocket-book clean out of it."

He stopped, apparently to gasp for breath.

"And, pray, what were you doing while Mr. Fleming behaved in this exceedingly peculiar way — even for Mr. Fleming?" inquired Mr. Cathcart.

"Doing!" Mr. Jackson was indignant. "Don't I tell you I was doing nothing? There was no time to do anything—it all happened in a flash. I had just come from my bankers—there were a hundred and thirty pounds in that pocket-book. When I realised that the fellow had taken it, I made a grab at him. And"—again Mr.

Jackson looked furtively about him, and once more the bandanna came into active play—"directly I did so, I don't know where he went to, but it seemed to me that he vanished into air—he was gone, like a flash of lightning. I told myself that I was mad—stark mad! but when I felt for my pocket-book, and found that that was also gone, I ran yelling to the door."

IV.

It was, as the old-time novelists used to phrase it, about three weeks after the events transpired which we have recorded in the previous chapter. Evening—after dinner. There was a goodly company assembled in the smoking room at the Climax Club. Conversation was general. They were talking of some of the curious circumstances which had attended the death of Colonel Lanyon. The medical evidence at the inquest had gone to shew that the Colonel had died of one of the numerous, and, indeed, almost innumerable, varieties of heart disease. The finding had been in accordance with the medical evidence. It seemed to be felt, by some of the speakers, that such a finding scarcely met the case.

"It's all very well," observed Mr. Cathcart, who seemed disposed to side with the coroner's jury, "for you fellows to talk, but in such a case, you must bring in some sort of verdict—and what other verdict could they bring? There was not a trace of any mark of violence to be found upon the man."

"It's my belief that he saw Fleming, and that Fleming frightened him to death."

It was Mr. Jackson who said this. Mr. Cathcart smiled a rather provoking smile.

"So far as I observed, you did not drop any hint of your belief when you were before the coroner."

"No, because I didn't want to be treated as a laughing-stock by a lot of idiots."

"Quite so; I can understand your natural objection to that, but still I don't see your line of argument. I should not have cared to question Lanyon's courage to Lanyon's face while he was living. Why should you suppose that such a man as Geoffrey Fleming was capable of such a thing as, as you put it, actually frightening him to death? I should say it was rather the other way about. I have seen Fleming turn green, with what looked very much like funk, at the sight of Lanyon."

Mr. Jackson for some moments smoked in silence.

"If you had seen Geoffrey Fleming under the circumstances in which I did, you would understand better what it is I mean."

"But, my dear Jackson, if you will forgive my saying so, it seems to me that you don't shew to great advantage in your own story. Have you communicated the fact of your having been robbed to the police?"

"I have."

"And have you furnished them with the numbers of the notes which were taken?"

"I have."

"Then, in that case, I shouldn't be surprised if Mr. Fleming were brought to book any hour of any day. You'll find he has been lying close in London all the time—he soon had enough of Ceylon."

A new comer joined the group of talkers—Frank Osborne. They noticed, as he seated himself, how much he seemed to have aged of late, and how particularly shabby he seemed just then. The first remark which he made took them all aback.

"Geoff Fleming's dead."

"Dead!" cried Mr. Philpotts, who was sitting next to Mr. Osborne.

"Yes—dead. I've heard from Deecie. He died three weeks ago."

"Three weeks ago!"

"On the day on which Lanyon died."

Mr. Cathcart turned to Mr. Jackson, with a smile.

"Then that knocks on the head your theory about his having frightened Lanyon to death; and how about your interview with him—eh, Jackson?"

Mr. Jackson did not answer. He suddenly went white. An intervention came from an unexpected quarter—from Mr. Philpotts.

"It seems to me that you are rather taking things for granted, Cathcart. I take leave to inform you that I saw Geoffrey Fleming, perhaps less than half-an-hour before Jackson did."

Mr. Cathcart stared.

"You saw him!—Philpotts!"

Then Mr. Bloxham arose and spoke.

"Yes, and I saw him, too—didn't I, Philpotts?"

Any tendency on the part of the auditors to smile was checked by the tone of exceeding bitterness in which Frank Osborne was also moved to testify.

"And I—I saw him, too!—Geoff!—dear old boy!

"Deecie says that there were two strange things about Geoff's death. He was struck by a fit of apoplexy. He was dead within the hour. Soon after he died, the servant came running to say that the bed was empty on which the body had been lying. Deecie went to see. He says that, when he got into the room, Geoff was back again upon the bed, but it was plain enough that he had moved. His clothes and hair were in disorder, his fists were clenched, and there was a look upon his face which had not been there at the moment of his death, and which, Deecie says, seemed a look partly of rage and partly of triumph.

ran, 'Remittance to hand. It comes in rather a miscellaneous form. Thanks all the same.' Deecie can only suppose that Geoff had managed, in some way, to procure the four hundred pounds which he had lost and couldn't pay, and had also managed, in some way, to send it on to Melbourne."

There was silence when Frank Osborne ceased to speak—silence which was broken in a somewhat startling fashion.

"Who's that touched me?" suddenly exclaimed Mr. Cathcart, springing from his seat.

They stared.



THE SOUND OF LAUGHTER PROCEEDING FROM THE, APPARENTLY, VACANT SEAT.

"I have been calculating the difference between Cingalese and Greenwich time. It must have been between three and four o'clock when the servant went running to say that Geoff's body was not upon the bed, —it was about that time that Lanyon died."

He paused—and then continued—

"The other strange thing that happened was this. Deecie says that the day after Geoff died a telegram came for him, which, of course, he opened. It was an Australian wire, and purported to come from the Melbourne sporting man of whom I told you." He turned to Mr. Philpotts. "It

"Touched you!" said someone. "No one's within half a mile of you. You're dreaming, my dear fellow."

Considering the provocation was so slight, Mr. Cathcart seemed strangely moved.

"Don't tell me that I'm dreaming—someone touched me on the shoulder!—What's that?"

"That" was the sound of laughter proceeding from the, apparently, vacant seat. As if inspired by a common impulse, the listeners simultaneously moved back.

"That's Fleming's chair," said Mr. Philpotts, beneath his breath.

THE TRAIL OF THE GOLDEN SCORPION.

A COMPLETE STORY.

By Sydney Clive.

Illustrated by S. H. Vedder.

I.

"LOOKS pretty and innocent, doesn't it?" observed the Man of Science.

"No, don't agree with you, it has a nasty expression in the bend of its tail, and all those jewels add to the native ugliness of the creature," said the Man of Action, decidedly. "Why on earth did Mahathala give it to you?"

"Gratitude; saved his little Princelet's life when he had smallpox. Bestowed on me no other fee, which rather distressed me, for though I'm not a licensed practitioner, I wouldn't mind taking a small acknowledgment of my services. You see, travelling in India is expensive, and I'm not over flush."

"And I should say you would need to be, in your walk in life," retorted the Man of Action. "You don't make much out of dried plants and herbs, I should think. Can't be much demand for them."

"No, there is not much, and the general public looks but coolly on a man who spends his life in scientific research," observed the Man of Science, with gentle sorrow. "The State ought to provide us with incomes, so that our minds should be left free for our great works. I have spent the best part of my life in this kind of thing"—he waved his hand towards a tray of withered leaves and plants—"and have received no return, save—a golden scorpion, for washing and dressing—I really did little else—a young coffee-coloured potentate. It makes one pause and consider whether one's time might not be more profitably employed."

The Man of Action laughed in answer to this tirade, as he lit his long cigar, and threw the match at the botanist's tray of dried treasures. It just escaped it, and the Man of Science sank back once more into his lounging attitude.

"Come now, Voltervane, talk sense—if you can. What are you going to do with this thing?"

As he spoke, the Man of Action lifted the jewelled scorpion gingerly by its tail, and suspended it in mid-air between finger and thumb. In the half-darkness of the shadowed verandah, it gleamed and flashed with a strange lustre, quivering in every joint of its scaled and incrusted body.

"It shouldn't be made in *scales*," said Voltervane, surveying it critically. "But I suppose it was intended to give it that trembling, life-like appearance. You ask what I'm going to do with it, Dersingham? I ought to sell it, but I'm afraid I shall be tempted to keep it, as a beginning of a museum, which will never exist, but that plea will salve my conscience for the extravagance of laying up so much gold, and so many precious stones."

"If you take my advice, you will get rid of it," said Ralph Dersingham, eyeing the glittering thing with little favour, as it swayed gently backwards and forwards in his grasp. "Didn't the Rajah tell you anything about it, man? It has an evil name throughout the whole Presidency."

"When His Highness presented it to me with a flowery speech on my various virtues and talents, he informed me that it ensured the best possible fortune to the possessor," rejoined Voltervane; "and I don't see why it should have a bad reputation on that account. Of course, I didn't believe the Rajah; I regarded what he said as meant to enhance the value of his gift, nothing more."

"Well, every man who has this little beast in his possession dies, Voltervane; and, in the two cases that I know of personally, the death was not a pleasant one. The scorpion gives three warnings; you have three accidents, I believe, before the final one."

"But does the Rajah keep a selection of these reptiles for presentation to his friends, as other people give photo-frames and note-books?" enquired Voltervane. It was the glaring defect of his character that he could

take nothing seriously. India—with her mystery, her tragedy, her shadows that hang equally over black and white; the land where the voice that sang the song at the camp fire in all innocent mirth—is hushed for ever by dawn, and the hand that touched the banjo strings is cold and heavy. India, where man walks for ever in the Shadow of Death, would, so one imagines, have a sobering effect on all, save the hopelessly



THE PRIEST SAW THE HAND SNATCH UP HIS TREASURE.—HE RUSHED AT THE CURTAIN AND THRUST AT IT WITH FURY.

stupid and frivolous; and certainly Correth Voltervane was neither, but the habit of life stuck to him: he would laugh until the end.

Ralph Dersingham had spent the best years of a steady, practical life in Mahapore. He was Commissioner of a district that all other Government servants shunned — a district as large as England and Scotland, with a dismal name for plague, pestilence and famine, and for treachery and silent vengeance on the part of its inhabitants.

But the Man of Action knew the people, and lived and worked amongst them fearless and unharmed, though in the last plague visitation he had narrowly escaped being shot by an infuriated Hindoo, whose ill-smelling premises he was carbolicing- -if one may coin a word—and whitewashing with his own hands. He had listened to native legends, native tales, native dreams; he had imbibed the mystic history of a mystic people, till he hesitated to call aught impossible. He looked gravely at his companion who put that careless question anent the Rajah's stock of precious scorpions, and shook his head.

"No," said Dersingham, thoughtfully. "It's always the same little beast; there is only one, and it always comes back to Mahathala, always."

"A cheap present, 'pon my word," answered Voltervane, laughing. "But come, Ralph, do tell me what you know about it: you should give a sceptic, like myself, information calculated to convert him. I assure you if that little creature makes me a man of wealth, I'll believe every one of the stories you tell me. Yes, from the evil eye downwards."

"Listen to me, then, Voltervane," said Dersingham, solemnly. "This thing is hundreds of years old. The legend runs that it was made by a priest who loved a dancing girl; made of no one knows what; gold it seems to us; but they say that human blood is what cements these scales."

"Hardly possible, after all these years, I should imagine," murmured the Man of Science. "No, I didn't mean to interrupt, old chap, do go on."

"This scorpion," continued Dersingham, slowly, "was meant to aid him in his incantations, sorceries, and so on, but the Nautch girl saw it, and coveted it wildly, for the sake of the jewels. So she hid one day behind a curtain when the priest was at his unholy work, with this little beast beside him, so close to the girl that she could have reached out her hand and taken it. When her lover's back was turned that was precisely what she did, but the priest saw the hand snatch up his treasure, and he rushed at the curtain and thrust at it with fury. The fingers that closed on the scorpion relaxed their hold, and the thief fell forward, enveloped in the folds of the curtain, stabbed to the heart. The priest, in his rage, spurned the body, but even as he did so, he saw that it was none other than his beloved Zeenut. Mad with anguish and remorse, for, so the legend runs, he had worshipped this girl with a love that was idolatry, he stabbed himself and died beside her; not, however, before he had invoked a terrible curse on the scorpion and on all who should possess it."

"Is that all?" enquired Correth Voltervane, with interest. "Don't you know what the curse was?"

"It is death," replied Dersingham. "I don't know how the scorpion came into the Rajah's possession, but this I do know, he is always trying to get rid of it. Over and over again has it been presented to people; they are delighted, naturally, till they die, and then in some mysterious way it comes back to Mahathala, and the old game begins."

"Why doesn't *he* die?" enquired the Man of Science, indignantly. "It seems a little hard that he should escape, when he is always palming it off on other people, doesn't it?"

"He probably has some counter charm; but sickness is always rife in his household, and his favourite wives are continually dying," returned the Man of Action, gravely. "And he can't get it out of the house, save by giving it to someone. They've tried to break it; they've tried to throw it into the pond; they've dropped it down a well; they've had it trampled on by scores of horsemen: but all to no purpose, the golden scorpion always——"

"Turns up smiling," supplemented Correth lightly. "And what do you advise me to do, Dersingham, with such a tough piece of goods? You said get rid of it, but how?"

"There's only one way—give it to someone," replied Ralph promptly. "You won't be able to sell it in India, and by the time you get to England it will probably have killed you."

"Humph! nice prospect. Well, may I give it to *you*?" said Voltervane, laughing.

"Here, chuck over the poor little beastie. And now, my dear friend, I beg your acceptance of this very elegant reptile. What! won't have it? Ah, well, then I'm afraid I must keep it myself."

"Will you grant me one favour," said Dersingham, earnestly; he knew it was useless to argue with Correth. "It's for your own sake; will you promise me one thing?"

"One, a million! Ask on, and it shall be granted thee," and Voltervane struck a theatrical attitude, whilst his friend continued:

"You will, I expect, disregard the first warning; you will probably pay no attention to the second; but don't persist in your pig-headed obstinacy when you receive the third; that I do implore and entreat you."

"Oh, if I recognise the warning—and I'll try to—I won't treat it lightly," answered the Man of Science, still swinging the topic of conversation by its pliable tail. "I'm off now to see that missionary, poor fellow. I can't do him much good, but it's a comfort to his daughter, and—she really is a very charming girl, Ralph."

Under the deep yellow-brown of Indian tan the Commissioner flushed red. "She is," he said, briefly. "Correth, I—I think I'll come with you, if you've no objection. It's a pleasant ride in the cool to the Mission House."

"I shall be delighted," rejoined Voltervane, in all sincerity, and the two set forth to visit the man who was dying of decline, after battling, with a sublime patience, against the difficulties that beset a missionary in that Presidency.

II.

For the natives objected strongly to conscientious meddling with their religious opinions, and their way of shewing their resentment was apt to cause hurried and secret flittings on the part of the zealots. Sometimes the missionaries had sought a refuge with the Commissioner, whom they regarded as a very backsliding and lukewarm adherent in the days of their authority, but who protected them when they had brought a hornets' nest about their ears, and kept them from the wrath of an aggravated and superstitious population.

Alan Dene had not had sufficient time to make himself obnoxious to his desired flock: also, he was a very gentle enthusiast, large-hearted, if narrow-minded, and more anxious to win the love of the people than a martyr's crown.

He lay in placid content on the verandah of the dilapidated old Mission House, waiting patiently for the last grains of the sands of life to run out.

"It is pleasant to see you, Mr. Voltervane," and two shadowy hands were held out. "Oh, I am much the same. Ralph, it is good of you to come; we have missed you lately, haven't we, Mary?" and the missionary turned to his daughter.

"We have," said Mary, quietly. "We thought we were forgotten."

And even as she said the words she read in Ralph Dersingham's eyes a silent protest against such an impossible supposition.

She was a delicately-moulded creature, whose chief charm lay in her extreme refinement of feature and form. The Commissioner loved her with all the strength of a nature deepened and mellowed by years of silent abnegation, and she returned his affection. There was the unspoken compact between them that marriage should not be thought of whilst Alan Dene lived; and it comforted the missionary to know that his daughter would not be left desolate by his death, that a strong arm would be there to support her, a steady heart to cherish her.

Now Ralph Dersingham had complained often of Correth Voltervane's incurable habit of laughing at everything; had the Commissioner but known, it was his—Dersingham's—salvation. For, when the Man of Science appeared at Mahathala, Mary Dene was strangely attracted by him, and he by her; and the ship that contained the Commissioner's entire and only cargo of happiness seemed in danger of foundering on the rock of treachery. But Voltervane laughed *to* himself *at* himself so consumedly, and was so entertained at the idea of a cross-grained, poverty-stricken, scientific bachelor of over forty falling in love; he put himself before Mary in such a ridiculous light, his constant frivolous tone of scepticism contrasted so unfavourably with Ralph's grave reserve, that Mary was disappointed and disgusted, and turned willingly from the Man of Science to the Man of Action. And the former had the pleasure of knowing that as he sank in Mary's estimation, her lover rose. "Which is very proper, and just as it should be," he told

himself, but his laugh was not quite so frequent after the visits to the Mission House.

They stayed to share the evening meal of the Denes, and afterwards the lovers wandered in the compound, with jackals to serenade them, and Correth stayed with the sick man. The two friends rode home in silence, Dersingham enjoying the delicious luxury of recalling every look, word and tone of Mary's, now that they were parted, and Voltervane deep in thought, with his head sunk on his breast, and a careless hold on his bridle rein.



"THE FIRST OF THE SCORPION'S WARNINGS! HOW WILL IT END?"

Which was, perhaps, the reason that his trusted mare shied suddenly, and threw him violently against the low stone wall of an adjacent garden. Ralph leaped from his horse, and was beside him in an instant.

"The first of the scorpion's warnings," he muttered, as he raised his senseless friend. "How will it end?"

But Correth was merely stunned for a second or two; he opened his eyes upon his friend, with such a terrible expression in them of horrible, insane fear, such a look of hideous, soul-shaking terror, that Dersingham turned away his head with a shudder.

"My God," said Voltervane, sitting upright and glaring at some object before him, "did you ever see such a devil's face, and the blood—and snakes—and the dead body, and——" he gave a sudden shriek, and hid his face like a frightened child on Dersingham's shoulder. "Don't leave me, don't leave me," he moaned; "Ralph——"

"All right, old fellow, I'm here," said the Commissioner soothingly. "You've had a fall and are a bit shaken, that's all."

But Voltervane was himself again. He rose to his feet with Ralph's assistance, and looked at him steadily.

"It seems to me," he said collectedly, "I've made a silly ass of myself. All the fault of your bogey tales of scorpions and priests, my boy. What made the mare shy, I wonder? If I weren't a teetotaler," he added lightly, "the vision I had as I 'came to' would make one think I was in for an attack of D.T.'s. My liver's out of order, I

presume. I'll take a dose of calomel this very night."

As he slowly mounted his horse, he glanced at Dersingham's troubled face.

"I suppose you think that the scorpion had something to do with my fall and visions," Correth said with an unsteady laugh. "Why, man, did you never hear before of a rabbit hole, and of a man having a threatening of a bilious attack?"

To which brave words, however, Ralph gave no answer.

III.

The stillness of an Indian night, disturbed only now and again by the howl of a jackal, was suddenly broken by a shrill scream—the scream men utter when taken unawares by death.

"The scorpion," said Dersingham, as he leaped from his bed and rushed to Voltervane's room, where he saw something very different from what he had expected.

On the floor, with Voltervane kneeling on his chest, lay a Hindoo, his dusky face turned to a deep plum colour, his eyes protruding in a manner horrible to see, and his tongue lolling out in the agonies of suffocation, as the iron hand of the Man of Science slowly choked the breath from his body.

In an instant Dersingham had dragged his friend from the prostrate creature, and dashed cold water over the Hindoo, who lay gurgling and gasping with the relief of the removal of that relentless grasp from his throat.

"Man alive," cried Ralph in horror, "why did you nearly kill the poor wretch?"

"Because of this," panted Voltervane, and, as he spoke, he shewed his left arm, dripping blood from a deep knife wound. "That beggar came to rob me, I went for him though I was unarmed, and he tried to kill me. He would have done it, too, if I hadn't tripped him up, and taught him a little lesson. Ah, you brute," as the man moaned and writhed on the floor, "I fancy you won't try to stab an Englishman again in a hurry."

"We must have this investigated," observed Dersingham, assuming his official manner, as the Hindoo put up a prayer for mercy. "You caught him in *flagrante delicto*, Voltervane?"

"Oh, I don't want to prosecute the beggar," replied Correth carelessly. "I wanted to kill him, it is true, a few seconds ago, but I bear no malice. I wonder who he is?"

"A stranger to me," answered Dersingham, scanning the man who grovelled before him. "I suppose we ought to search him, he may have——"

But the words died on his lips, as the Hindoo, with trembling hands, took something from his breast, and laid it with averted face at Voltervane's feet. It was the golden scorpion.

"Oh, if you had only let him escape with it!" cried Dersingham involuntarily. "Let him keep it, for God's sake, let him keep it!"

"It seems a dashed cowardly thing to do, if it really has the power of killing the poor beggar," returned Voltervane. "But I don't think you'll find him accept the generous present. Ask him."

Ralph spoke to the would-be thief and offered him the precious creature, that represented untold wealth to the Hindoo, but the latter retreated from the gift in horror, saying something Correth could not catch.

"He says he would not have taken it had he known what it was, and that he has no desire to die in torments," Dersingham translated grimly. "You were right."

"Then tell him to be off immediately, and not sit there," retorted the Man of Science impatiently, and at a word from Dersingham, the Hindoo gathered himself up and disappeared through the open door.

"Remember your promise," said Ralph entreatingly to Correth. "The third warning you will take notice of."

"I don't consider I've had the second," replied Voltervane coolly. "And now, my dear fellow, let us go to sleep again; what a fool I was to have my revolver just beyond convenient reaching distance!"

The next morning when the two friends met, by tacit consent neither mentioned the night's adventure. Correth thought a good deal of the scorpion that, prompted by some strange whim, he had put in his pocket, and Ralph was distinctly preoccupied. Both were, however, startled into practical life by a message from Mary Dene, saying her father had died during the night.

"We'll go over at once," said the Man of Science. "Poor fellow, I little thought yesterday was the last time I should see him in life. What a pity, as he was going to die any way, that I did not give Alan Dene the scorpion," Correth said to himself, but he

laughed the next moment at having for an instant believed in the absurd powers with which the small reptile was credited.

They found Mary very quiet, very composed, but she clung to Dersingham in a manner that shewed she was thankful for his support and presence.

The Man of Science turned abruptly on his heel, and left them. He went into the neglected, untidy compound, and here the third warning of the scorpion came to him, in the shape of a cobra, on which, in unusual carelessness (for as a rule he walked with the utmost circumspection), he trod, and had it not been for almost unprecedented quickness in stepping back, it would have bitten him.

Such an escape is a thing to set a man's heart beating with uncomfortable rapidity, and to make his knees fail beneath him. Correth Voltervane made his way back to the house and sat down rather suddenly, whilst he wiped from his forehead a dew that fear had brought there.

"I am getting nervous and confoundedly fanciful; so whether this little beast is to blame or not, I'll get rid of it before I lose my nerve, quite," he said, and as he looked at the shining thing lying on his palm a sudden idea came to him.

Lightly, with an air of furtiveness, as though about to commit some crime, he stole through the house to the death chamber. It was empty of all save what lay there. Voltervane looked earnestly at the placid face, then he slipped the scorpion between the pale folded hands, and withdrew as silently as he had come.

"Its chances of doing mischief must be over now," he murmured. "I've given it away to a man whom it can't possibly harm; I fancy I've broken the charm, or removed the curse, whichever you like to call it."

IV.

A week after her father's death, Mary Dene was married to Ralph Dersingham. Her desolate position had prevented a conventional period of mourning being observed; she was quite alone in the world, and Ralph was only too eager to have the right to protect and cherish her. The wedding took place at a little station many miles from Mahathala; the bride was the guest of the chaplain and his wife, and Ralph stayed at the hotel. He had in vain tried to persuade Correth to accompany him in the capacity of best man,



ON THE FLOOR, WITH VOLTERVANE KNEELING ON HIS CHEST, LAY A HINDOO.

but the Man of Science refused firmly, rather to Ralph's surprise.

But as Correth said to himself: "Though I've killed my happiness, I don't think I can attend its funeral. I shall stay on here and endeavour to accustom myself to think of her as another man's wife."

He had taken a fancy to the ramshackle old Mission House, and he established himself there, pending another and more legitimate occupant, during the absence of bride and bridegroom from the Commissioner's bungalow on a brief wedding tour. After all, it was something to inhabit the same dwelling that had once sheltered Mary, and Correth tried in vain to laugh at himself, and say he was a sentimental idiot.

The night the happy pair arrived at Mahathala, he was invited to dinner, and went to see Mary in her new character, with a strange mingling of pain and pleasure.

"Welcome home, Mrs. Dersingham," he said gaily, as he clasped Mary's hand in his. "As an old friend I may claim a privilege," and without waiting for permission, he kissed her brow lightly, but the touch of his lips was icy cold.

"It's nice to be at home again," said Ralph, as he surveyed his graceful young wife with pardonable pride. "In the first place, there's no place like it, and in the second, Correth, we were really unfortunate; our honeymoon was a chapter of accidents; some ill-fate seemed to pursue Mary. She had a narrow escape from drowning when we were fording a river; then when we were out riding, her horse fell, and it was a miracle that he did not crush her; and lastly, the wing of the hotel we were staying in caught fire, whilst she was having a siesta, and it was with difficulty I rescued her. Really I assure you, I am glad to have her at home."



THERE, FLASHING WITH WICKED RADIANCE, LAY THE GOLDEN SCORPION.

As Dersingham spoke, Correth thought of the golden scorpion, and in spite of all scepticism, he shivered with apprehension as he wondered whether from the grave that mysterious, wicked creature could exert its awful power over the dead man's daughter.

No, it was impossible, how could it be?

When Mary left the dinner table, Ralph turned to his friend, eager to ask a question that had been on his lips the whole evening.

"Voltervane, what have you done with that infernal little reptile?" he asked eagerly; "have you it still in your possession?"

"No," answered Correth briefly, "you can make yourself quite easy, old fellow. The

golden scorpion will harm no one again. It is safely out of the way."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Dersingham with a sigh of relief. "I was haunted by the idea you would disregard the third and last warning. I am thankful you didn't, that's all. Shall we join Mary now?"

"I wonder what he would think of the way in which I rid myself of the noxious little beast," thought Correth. "Somehow, I fancy he would object."

He did not stay long, though Ralph pressed him to, and Mary added her entreaties very prettily, but even though you are a philosopher, and a laughing one to boot, it is not always easy to look at happiness, the happiness you coveted for yourself, through another man's eyes.

"For a man to fall in love at my age is stark, staring lunacy, and I ought to be shut up in an asylum," he said to himself as he remained smoking on his verandah, for he hated sleep, and had trained himself to manage with an infinitesimal quantity.

And he remained on, in the glorious, pure splendour of an Indian night, thinking, smoking and enjoying the perfect peace, when the latter was suddenly broken by the sound of a horse's galloping. Voltervane threw away his cigar and sprang to his feet. There was a sound of dire terror, of great need, in that mad gallop. Fearing he scarcely knew what, Correth waited with beating heart for that reckless rider to draw rein at the Mission House.

A half-inarticulate exclamation escaped him as the horseman threw himself from the saddle and Correth recognised in him one of Dersingham's servants. The man leaped up the verandah steps, holding out a note which Correth snatched from him. One glance at the few words it contained was sufficient to make the Man of Science leap into the saddle the servant had just vacated, and ride back with mad speed to the house he had quitted but a few hours since. And to Correth it seemed that the horse galloped to the sound of the words that had struck cold terror to his heart: "Come, for God's sake, Mary is dying!"

As steed and rider thundered along, these words were everywhere—in the air, whispered in his ear by a thousand voices, and in the distant cry of a jackal, Correth heard that one awful sentence. It seemed to him as though the whole world were telling him that Mary must die. and he set his teeth and swore that if human skill could avail aught she should be saved. With the first vague hint of dawn, he arrived at the Commissioner's bungalow, which, in the cold chill of unborn morning, had that desolate, lonely air which houses often wear when death is an inmate.

No one was about, no one seemed stirring, and Voltervane left his horse and went to the room where the dying girl lay.

Several servants were huddled round the open doorway, but they fell aside as Correth passed and made his way to the bed, beside which knelt Ralph Dersingham.

At the sound of his friend's footsteps, the Commissioner turned and Correth saw that his pale face was very tranquil.

"Thank you for coming, old fellow," he said, quietly; "but it's too late—she died half-an-hour ago—yes—it was cholera. She suffered a good deal—for two hours."

Voltervane gazed at the figure on the bed; he scarcely grasped that it was Mary who lay before him; Mary, whom he had last seen in all the glory of her ethereal loveliness but a few short hours ago.

"I sent for you because I knew—you would help us—if anyone could." Dersingham's voice was curiously even and monotonous. "It—if you'll manage all for me, old fellow, I shall be very grateful—I don't feel as though I could."

Voltervane could only say "yes," and watch Ralph in some anxiety, as the latter, with an abstracted, musing air, smoothed back the fair hair that had fallen half over the dead girl's face, hiding it from view.

"Ralph," Correth said, gently, but with determination, drawing his friend away, "come with me, you must not stay here, it is worse than useless. Go into your dressing-room, and I will give you something to make you sleep. Come, old fellow, do obey me."

"Very well," said Dersingham, with strange docility. "I'll do anything you like, Correth, and—I'm *very* tired."

He walked in a groping, half blind fashion to the dressing-room, stumbling like a drunken man. Voltervane followed him, and once he had him lying on the sofa, he hurriedly looked in the medicine chest for a sleeping draught, and administered one that would at least ensure some hours of blessed oblivion. Then he left him, and once more entered the death-chamber where lay all that was mortal of the woman the two men had loved so well.

With reverent hands, Correth arranged the

richly-hued hair on the pillow and, sceptic though he called himself, he wished he could lay some emblem of Christianity upon that quiet breast.

On the dressing table lay Mary's Bible and little crucifix; the latter was what he wanted, and he took it. But, as he turned away, with his elbow he swept off the table a crystal box, lined with velvet. It fell with a crash to the floor, and broke into many fragments.

It had been Mary's jewel box, and her trinkets went rolling in every direction. With an impatient exclamation at his carelessness, after listening to hear if the noise had awakened Ralph, Voltervane stooped to collect the scattered ornaments, when he beheld a sight that seemed to paralyse him with horror.

There, on the matting, flashing and shining with wicked radiance in the darkened room, lay the golden scorpion—the evil thing he had fondly imagined buried for ever in Alan Dene's grave.

Carefully Correth picked it up and examined it. Yes, it was the same; of that there could be no doubt. He thought of Dersingham's description the previous night of the perils that had beset Mary; the dangers she had undergone; three in number. She had in all probability removed the scorpion from her father's lifeless hands, to substitute some more pious token. Then she placed the creature for safe keeping in that box, and entirely forgot its existence in the sorrows and joys that were so quickly crowded on her.

Correth saw it all, and he knew that he was the passive murderer of the woman for whose sake he would have died.

Mechanically, he slipped the scorpion into his pocket, and tried to think what he could do. What was there to be done? Only one thing—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth!

The day wore on; Dersingham awoke to find his friend watching beside him, and the unnatural composure of the Man of Action gave way. Correth was glad to see him weep; his own eyes were hot, but the well of tears seemed dried.

"I've done all," he said very gently.

"Yes; it is at sundown."

There was no chaplain at Mahathala, and Dersingham could not command his voice, so it fell to the lot of Voltervane to read the Burial Service over Mary. Quietly, reverently, the solemn words fell on the still air; Correth read not only for the dead, he read for himself, the living. When all was over, he went back to the deserted, bereaved house, and stayed some time with Dersingham, then with a solemnity not unbefitting the occasion, he bade his friend good-bye and returned to the Mission House.

In his room, with locked doors, Voltervane placed the jewelled scorpion on the table, beside a loaded revolver. Then he sat down and wrote a letter to Dersingham, telling him briefly the story of his attempt to rid himself innocently of the evil creature, and the harm he had so unwittingly wrought thereby.

"Bury the accursed thing with me, and, old fellow, if you can, forgive me for having ruined your happiness. I am making what reparation I can by carrying out the old Scriptural law of 'A life for a life,'" Correth wrote, with a steady hand. "I am cured of my scepticism, and I could not live after having been the cause of Mary's death, for, Ralph—I loved her, too."



FOUND BY the MISSING LINK.



ONE OF MR. W. L. ALDEN'S QUAINT SHORT STORIES.

[NOT FOUNDED ON FACT.]

Illustrated by S. H. Vedder.

"IF we could only find the Missing Link," said the Professor, "there would be an end to all doubt as to the theory of development. My own idea is that some day he will be found."

"Wasn't there an expedition in search of the Missing Link a few years ago?" asked young Horton. "If I remember rightly, the expedition went to Borneo, or some such place, and never returned."

"Precisely so," replied the Professor. "I fancy that the whole affair was mismanaged, for the man at the head of the expedition was certainly not the man for the place."

We were sitting in the smoking room of the Lord Warden hotel at Dover—a company of weather-bound travellers, waiting for the storm to abate sufficiently to permit the Calais steamer to leave the shelter of the breakwater. There were a dozen of us all told, but the Professor, as we called him, without, however, having any real authority for conferring the title upon him, rather monopolised the conversation, which for some time had been devoted to the Darwinian theory. Suddenly an American, who had something of the look of the merchant sailor about him, took his cigar from his mouth and remarked: "Finding the Missing Link is all right. But having the Link find you mightn't be altogether satisfactory."

"I do not quite understand you," said the Professor rather stiffly.

"O! I ain't giving out any conundrums. I said that having the Link find you might not suit you all the way down to the ground. I'm speaking, sir, from experience, for I was once found by that identical Missing Link that you are so anxious to see, and the experience was a mighty curious one. If you gentlemen want to hear about it, just sing out, and I'll give you the whole yarn."

Several of us replied that we should be glad to hear the sailor's story, and without any further delay he launched into it.

* * * *

About six years ago I was at Singapore, and I don't mind saying that I was on the beach—if you know what that means. I had shipped as A.B. aboard a big four-masted ship out of Newcastle, bound to Shanghai, and I got disgusted with the grub, and the way in which I and the rest of the men were treated. So when we put into Singapore for water—having met with calms and head winds that had delayed us on the passage out—I deserted, and kept shady till the ship had sailed. I found out afterwards that I would have done better if I had stuck to the ship, for after waiting pretty near five weeks in Singapore, and not being able to get a ship, I was kicked out by the boarding-house keeper, and had to sleep in the open, and live on food that I could beg from the natives.

Well! One day there came to Singapore a scientific chap by the name of Butler, and my idea is that he was the identical chap

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that the Professor was speaking of just now. He was going into the Interior to hunt for a new style of monkey that he called the Missing Link, and he was anxious to find a white man who would join him. I needn't say that I was glad to go with him, for it meant food and the half of a tent and twenty dollars a month to me. I was the only white man in the expedition besides Butler. We had three Malays with us, who were to carry our provisions and things and act as a sort of guard, and the five of us calculated to travel across the peninsula, heading in a North-easterly direction, and coming out on the opposite coast. The country that we were to go through had never been visited by a white man, and we supposed that it was full of tigers, and savages, and such-like things. But Butler was full of his project of finding the Missing Link. He had heard from the natives that somewhere in the Interior there was a big monkey, considerably bigger than a man, who was more of a man than a monkey. The story said that he hadn't any tail to speak of, and that he was intelligent enough to build huts, and to knock down other animals with a club. Butler said that he was sure that this monkey was sort of half-way between man and beast, and he expected that if he could find him and bring him to Europe, his fortune would be made. I didn't take any stock in the story, and didn't care whether it was true or not. All I wanted was to get a berth where I could earn my living, and it was all the same to me whether I was hunting Missing Links in the jungle, or doing sailor work aboard ship.



WHEN I WOKE UP, WHAT I THOUGHT WAS AN ENORMOUS MONKEY WAS STANDING OVER ME WITH MY GUN IN HIS HAND.

We started in good spirits, but I'm free to say that if any man who knew anything about expeditions in the jungle had seen us and expressed his opinion, he would have said that we were a set of—well, everlasting fools! We were armed all right, for every man had a rifle, and Butler had a spare shot-gun besides. And we had plenty of ammunition—about enough, as I judged, to supply a small army for a six months' campaign. But in the matter of food we were on short rations from the first. Butler carried very little except a sort of lozenge, made, as he said, out of meat. He calculated that we would find all the game we wanted, and that the lozenges would come in handy when he happened to be out of

game. We didn't take any water except about a pint for each man in a water-bottle, and there was only a pint of brandy in the whole expedition, Butler being a teetotaler.

We had bad luck from the very first. We didn't meet with many natives except for the first week, and most of them were reasonably friendly, though we did have to shoot one chap just to discourage the others from looting. The jungle was that thick that you couldn't force your way through it, except with a machette or an axe, and first along we kept to the paths that the natives had made. After a while we came to a part of the country where there were no natives to speak of, and the only paths were the tracks made by the wild animals. They were quite as good as the native paths, but they ran all round the compass, and you might follow one of them for a whole day and find when night came round again that you were nearer your place of departure than you had been in the morning.

We didn't see much game, but we managed to get enough to keep us from starving, though, as a general thing, we were pretty hungry. About the tenth day, as near as I could reckon, one of the Malays was gathered in by a tiger. We shot the beast, but there wasn't enough left of the Malay to be of any use. Three days later the other two bolted in the night, taking their rifles with them. This left Butler and me alone, but he wasn't a bit discouraged. We filled our pockets with cartridges, and left the rest of the outfit behind us. Butler said that, according to his reckoning, we had about reached the part of the country where he expected to find his Link, but he didn't see any signs of him. We marched along pretty steady during the morning and evening, but we had to halt during the middle of the day on account of the heat. Our tobacco gave out after the first week—that is, mine did, for Butler didn't use tobacco—and I suffered more from that than I did from the heat or hunger. We couldn't make a fire, except once in a long while, for we hadn't brought but a few boxes of matches, and we couldn't afford to run through with them. Of course, we had to take watch and watch at night, so as to be ready for any wild beast that might try to investigate us; but with the exception of



I SMILED MY BEST SMILE AND SAID, "GLAD TO MAKE YOUR ACQUAINTANCE, MY DEAR!"

the tiger that carried off the Malay, hardly any animal came near us. I suppose the jungle was too thick to be a handy place for big game, but it suited the small fellows and the snakes and other vermin. I never saw such a place for snakes of all sizes and colours, but Butler said most of them were harmless. Perhaps they were, but I never put any confidence in a snake, no matter who he is; and it might have been better for Butler if he'd done the same.

I tell you it was lonesome, sitting down in that jungle in the dead of night, with Butler asleep close by, and all sorts of strange rustlings going on among the trees and the underbrush. Overhead I could see the stars stretched along a narrow lane made by the tops of the trees on each side of the wild beast track. I found it lonesome sometimes at sea when I was on the fo'c'sle-head on the look-out, with the rest of the watch snoring under the weather bulwarks, and not a sound stirring except the creaking of a block and the strokes of the bell from aft. But in that jungle you felt as if you was cast away in a boat without another soul. It's queer what noises go on in such a place —noises that are not made by animals, or yet by the wind. I've heard deep breathing close beside me, when there wasn't a breath of air stirring and not an animal within hearing. An animal can't move in a jungle without rustling the leaves or making the twigs crackle, but that heavy breathing would come within a yard of me without the least rustle or crackle. It was as if the earth itself breathed in the night; as if she had been overheated and tired in the day, and then when night came she took long breaths and settled herself to sleep.

We'd been marching through that jungle for more than a fortnight—perhaps three weeks—after leaving Singapore, when Butler was bitten by a snake, and died in less than six hours. He was a brave man, if he wasn't a first-class explorer, and he died as coolly as if he was going to sleep. There was nothing I could do for him, for we hadn't any medicine for snake bites, and if he had been loaded down with it I don't believe it could have saved him. I got him to take some brandy, but he wouldn't take enough to do him any real good. He talked sensibly with me, though he was suffering a lot of pain. He told me to take his compass and steer north-east till I came to the coast, where I would stand a chance of finding a settlement. He left me all his money, which was about three hundred pounds in gold, and urged me to keep my weather eye lifting for the Missing Link, and, if possible, to capture him and take him down to the coast with me. Finally, he made me promise not to bury him—and, considering that I had no undertaking tools except a knife, I don't know as I could have buried him if I had tried. It was his idea that the wild beasts would superintend his funeral, and he said he had as soon be disposed of in that way as in any other. Perhaps he was right. We do take a lot of trouble about what is left of us when we die, and perhaps it's all sentiment instead of sense.

When Butler was gone, I dragged him a little way into the jungle and covered him as well as I could with leaves and twigs. He and I had never been pals, for I was just a sailorman hired to work for him, but when he died and I was left alone in the jungle, I felt as you feel on a bright, breezy day, when the sun suddenly goes under a thick cloud, and the sea turns grey, and the wind begins to moan in the rigging. I knew that I hadn't any chance worth speaking of. I was alone with the thick jungle around me, that seemed to press tight on my throat like a hot Hooghly fog. If the wild beasts didn't gather me in, or savages make a dinner of me, I should probably die of starvation long before I could reach the coast. All that day I tramped along, getting hungry and tired, and not meeting any game that I could shoot; and when night came I lay down, wishing that I was back at Singapore starving among human beings in what you might call a social sort of way.

When I woke up it was daylight, and what at first I thought was an enormous monkey was standing over me on his hind legs with my gun in his hand. I jumped up pretty lively, but he had me by the scruff of the neck by the time I was on my feet. His hand was like a steam engine. I could fairly feel his fingers sinking into the flesh. However, I didn't say anything, or even try to twist myself loose. He had me, and the only thing I could do was to wait and see what would turn up.

We started along the narrow path, I in front and he behind, shoving me along with his grip on my neck. The only part of him I could see were his feet which now and then came into sight when he took a long step.

I noticed that they were like hands. They had fingers instead of toes, and a regular thumb in the place where a man's big toe is placed. All of a sudden it came to me that this was Butler's Missing Link. I had often heard him say that the Link would be

don't walk on their hind legs, and carry guns in one hand and hold a man by the neck with the other. He wasn't a man, for he had the feet of an ape, and he wore fur instead of clothes. Consequently, he must be the Missing Link, and I remember thinking



SMILING AT THEM BOTH, I ATE RAW RABBIT AS IF IT WAS PLUM DUFF.

covered with hair, and would probably have feet something like hands, but in other respects he would be pretty much like a human being. The creature that had captured me answered exactly to this description; I knew he wasn't any sort of a monkey—or ape, as I should say, for apes

that it was a big joke that I should have started to find him and that he should have found me instead.

In about half an hour, as I should judge, we left the path, and pushing our way through the jungle where the undergrowth was thinner than usual, we came to

a little clearing, where there was a hut built of young saplings, driven into the ground, and lashed together at the top with vines. We stopped outside of the hut and the Link sang out in his lingo, and presently there came out of the hut another Link, his wife, as I supposed. The two chattered about me, Mr. Link shewing me and my gun, and they evidently agreeing that I was a valuable specimen. Finally, Mr. Link stood me up against a tree and made me fast to it with a rope of twisted tendrils, and then, picking up a big club, went into the forest.

I needn't say that I was pretty badly scared. Without my gun I was helpless, and there didn't seem to be much chance that I would get hold of it again. I couldn't get my hands free, for Mr. Link had lashed them to the tree with the judgment of an able seaman. I imagined, from his having taken his club with him, that he had gone off in search of game, which looked as if he and his wife didn't consider me to be good eating. You needn't remind me that monkeys don't eat meat. I knew that, and thought of it at the time, but a Missing Link has risen above the monkey species so far that I thought it very probable that he might have learned to eat his cousin man, as well as other sorts of meat.

Mrs. Link sat on the ground about two yards distant from me, looking at me with what I fancied was a rather admiring expression in her eyes. Says I to myself—"You're in a mighty tight place, and your only chance is to make friends with these Links." So I smiled my best smile and said to Mrs. Link —"Glad to make your acquaintance, my dear!" It fetched her the first time. She couldn't smile, for her mouth wasn't built for it, but she chuckled in a way that shewed she was pleased, and then she came over to me and patted me on the cheek. I kept on smiling for all I was worth, and talking to her in a friendly and respectful way. Of course, I knew that she couldn't understand a word I said, but I calculated that she, being a female, would understand that I was paying her compliments, and that I was full of respect for her character. A woman is a woman even when she is a Link, and I didn't make any mistake about this one.

By-and-by Mr. Link came back with a dead rabbit, and the two sat down to breakfast. They evidently didn't know anything about a fire, for they ate the rabbit raw, pulling it to pieces with their hands and teeth. Presently Mrs. Link tossed me over a choice bit, and when I looked reproachfully at her, as if to say, "How on earth do you expect me to eat with my hands tied behind my back!" she said something to her lord, and he then came and cast off the lashing. I didn't lose any time in sitting down close to Mrs. Link, and smiling at them both, while I ate raw rabbit as if it was plum duff. They were a good-tempered couple, and before I had got through with breakfast they had plainly made up their minds that I was an intelligent and harmless animal, and that they'd take me in and make a sort of domestic pet of me.

I don't propose to read off a regular log of every hour I spent with the Links. I was with them close on to four weeks, and they treated me civilly all the time. At night I slept in the hut with them, and they gave me a pile of leaves for a bed that was twice as thick as the beds they used for themselves. Mr. Link wouldn't let me go into the forest either alone or with him, but that was about all the restriction that he put upon me. He was gone on the hunt for game most of the day, and Mrs. Link and I stopped at home, and slept and talked. That the Links had a genuine language I never had the least doubt, though I could never get to understand more than three or four words of it, and those I have forgotten. It sounded to me something like French, though I don't really know much about French, and perhaps the reason why I fancied it sounded like French was that somehow a man always associates French with monkeys. As I said, Mrs. Link and I talked a lot to one another, and it seemed to do her good, though I could never exactly see why.

I did considerable work for the Links first and last. I improved and enlarged their hut until they regarded it as the swellest place ever built. I made forks for them out of big thorns, and I was tempted to shew them my matches, and teach them the use of fire. But I had only a small box of matches left, and I knew that if ever I escaped from the Links, I would need them myself—the worst way. They never discovered them, for they never dreamed that I had pockets. Their idea was that my clothes were permanent, just like their fur, and as I never took them off while I was with them they never suspected that I wasn't born in a blue flannel shirt and ragged trousers. Why,

Mrs. Link mistook a hole in the left leg of my trousers for some new kind of sore, and one day she insisted on rubbing it with some patent salve that she got out of a sort of gum tree. They saw very soon that raw meat didn't altogether meet my views, and after that they always brought me nuts, and a sort of wild turnip. Take those Links by and large they treated me the best they knew how, and in my opinion Mr. Link was her. She used to pick out the best bones and the biggest nuts for me, and she was always bringing me water to drink in a cocoanut shell, and she never got tired of patting me on the head. Mr. Link never shewed the least sign of jealousy. I supposed that he considered the idea that a Link could fall in love with a creature like a man was too ridiculous to be thought of for a moment. All the time I kept longing for



I PUT MY ARM ROUND HER WAIST AND GAVE HER A KISS. YOU NEVER SAW A GIRL AT CHRISTMAS TIME MORE DELIGHTED.

more of a gentleman than half the men in Singapore, though I'll allow that isn't saying very much.

As for Mrs. Link, I don't deny that she made a dead set at me. Mind, I'm not saying a word against her character, for as far as I know, she was a perfectly respectable Link. All I mean is that she took a great fancy to me, and tried to make me take the same to her, for which nobody could blame my gun, which the Links had hid in some place where I couldn't find it. I don't know what they thought of the gun, or why they hid it. Perhaps their idea was that it wasn't respectable for a Link to be seen in the possession of such a thing, just as an Englishman when he goes to Italy thinks that it is preposterous in the Italians to wear cloaks. I'm ashamed to say that the way I got possession of that gun again was

by teaching Missus Link the art of kissing. I often made signs that I wanted the gun, and I could see that she understood them, but she would never bring it to me. One day I put my arm around her waist and gave her a kiss. It hit her where she lived, and you never saw a girl at Christmas time, who had been kissed under the mistletoe by her young man, seem more delighted than Mrs. Link seemed.

The next time we were alone she hinted by her manner that she would like to try the lesson over again, but I wouldn't understand her, and kept on making signs about the missing gun. After a while she got up, and went into the jungle, and I began to think that she was pouting, but in a few minutes she came back and handed me the gun.

Then I did give her an honest kiss, and to tell the truth, though she wasn't much more of a beauty than the orang in the Zoo, I felt almost fond of her.

I hid the gun under my bed, a plan she evidently approved of, and that made me understand that she had run some risk of displeasing the other Link by sneaking the gun. That night, when the two Links were sound asleep, I reached for the gun and slipped out of the hut. I hated to leave them without saying good-bye, but, of course, that wasn't possible. However, I did leave on the side of Mrs. Link's bed a little bit of a looking glass that I had carried in my pocket, and I hope it reconciled her to my loss.

I ran the most of that night, and must have put fifteen miles between myself and the Links by daylight. Then I lay down for a nap, and when I got up, and started on the march again, I caught sight of something blue shewing through the jungle; I had found the sea after all, and by noon I was safe aboard a ship that I had sighted close into shore, and swam to, taking the chances that it was an honest ship and not a pirate.

Now gentlemen, you may not believe this story, but it's the solemn truth! The Missing Link lives somewhere in the north-east part of the peninsula, and though I can't exactly say that I found him, I'm dead certain that he found me. I've never told the story before, because I hate to be taken for one of your newspaper reporters, that are always having tremendous adventures that never happened. But if you should see my old rifle, and notice the marks of teeth on the barrel where one of the Links tested it, you'd have to admit that either the marks were made by the teeth of a man who could bite laminated steel, or that they were made by an animal answering to the description of the Missing Link.



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WATCHING THE PROCESSION.



By H. G. WELLS,

Author of "The Invisible Man," "The War of the Worlds," &c., &c.

A COMPLETE STORY. Illustrated by MAX COWPER.

"THERE'S a man in that shop," said the Doctor, "who has been in Fairyland."

"Nonsense!" I said, and stared back at the shop. It was the usual village shop, post-office, telegraph wire on its brow, zinc pans and brushes outside, boots, shirtings and potted meats in the window. "Tell me about it," I said, after a pause.

"*I* don't know," said the Doctor. "He's an ordinary sort of lout—Skelmersdale is his name. But everybody about here believes it like Bible truth."

I reverted presently to the topic.

"I know nothing about it," said the Doctor, "and I don't *want* to know. I attended him for a broken finger—Married and Single cricket match—and that's when I struck the nonsense. That's all. But it shows you the sort of stuff I have to deal with, anyhow, eh? Nice to get modern sanitary ideas into a people like this!"

"Very," I said in a mildly sympathetic tone, and he went on for the seventeenth time to tell me about that business of the Bonham drain. Things of that kind, I observe, are apt to weigh on the minds of Medical Officers of Health. I was as sympathetic as I knew how, and when he called the Bonham people "asses" I said they were "thundering asses," but even that did not allay him.

Afterwards, later in the summer, an urgent desire to seclude myself, while finishing my chapter on Spiritual Pathology—it was really, I believe, stiffer to write than it is to read—took me to Bignor. I lodged at a farmhouse, and presently found myself outside that little general shop again, in search of tobacco. "Skelmersdale," said I to myself at the sight of it, and went in.

I was served by a short, but shapely, young man, with a fair downy complexion, good, small teeth, blue eyes, and a languid manner. I scrutinised him curiously. Except for a touch of melancholy in his expression, he was nothing out of the common. He was in the shirt-sleeves and tucked-up apron of his trade, and a pencil was thrust behind his inoffensive ear. Athwart his black waistcoat was a gold chain, from which dangled a bent guinea.

"Nothing more to-day, sir?" he enquired. He leant forward over my bill as he spoke.

"Are you Mr. Skelmersdale?" said I.

"I am, sir," he said, without looking up.

"Is it true that you have been in Fairyland?"

He looked up at me for a moment with wrinkled brows, with an aggrieved, exasperated face. "O SHUT it!" he said, and, after a moment of hostility, eye to eye, he went on adding up my bill. "Four, six and a half," he said, after a pause. "Thank you, sir."

So, unpropitiously, my acquaintance with Mr. Skelmersdale began.

Well, I got from that to confidence—through a series of toilsome efforts. I picked him up again in the Village Room, where of a night I went to play billiards after my supper, and mitigate the extreme seclusion from my kind that was so helpful to work during the day. I contrived to play with him and afterwards to talk with him. I found the one subject to avoid was Fairyland. On everything else he was open and amiable in a commonplace sort of way, but on that he had been worried—it was a manifest taboo. Only once in the room did I hear the slightest allusion to his experience in his presence, and that was by a cross-grained farm hand who was losing to him. Skelmersdale had run a break into double figures, which, by the Bignor standards, was uncommonly good play. "Steady on!" said his adversary. "None of your fairy flukes!"

Skelmersdale stared at him for a moment, cue in hand, then flung it down and walked out of the room.

"Why can't you leave 'im alone?" said a respectable elder who had been enjoying the game, and in the general murmur of disapproval, the grin of satisfied wit faded from the ploughboy's face.

I scented my opportunity. "What's this joke," said I, "about Fairyland?"

"'Tain't no joke about Fairyland, not to young Skelmersdale," said the respectable elder, drinking.

A little man with rosy cheeks was more communicative. "They *do* say, sir," he said, "that they took him into Aldington Knoll an' kep' him there a matter of three weeks."

And with that the gathering was well under weigh. Once one sheep had started others were ready enough to follow, and in a little time I had at least the exterior aspect of the Skelmersdale affair. Formerly, before he came to Bignor, he had been in that very similar little shop at Aldington Corner, and there it was that whatever it was did happen had taken place. The story was clear that he had stayed out late one night on the Knoll and vanished for three weeks from the sight of men, and had returned with "his cuffs as clean as when he started," and his pockets full of dust and ashes. He returned in a state of moody wretchedness that only slowly passed away, and for many days he would give no account of where it was he had been. The girl he was engaged to at Clapton Hill tried to get it out of him and threw him over partly because he refused, and partly because, as she said, he fairly gave her the "'ump." And then when, some time after, he let out to someone carelessly that he had been in Fairyland and wanted to go back, and when the thing spread and the simple badinage of the countryside came into play, he threw up his situation abruptly, and came to Bignor to get out of the fuss. But as to what had happened in Fairyland none of these people knew. There the gathering in the Village Room went to pieces like a pack at fault. One said this, and another said that.

Their air in dealing with this marvel was ostensibly critical and sceptical, but I could see a considerable amount of belief showing through their guarded qualifications. I took a line of intelligent interest, tinged with a reasonable doubt of the whole story.

"If Fairyland's inside Aldington Knoll," I said, "why don't you dig it out?"

"That's what I says," said the young ploughboy.

"There's a-many have tried to dig on Aldington Knoll," said the respectable elder, solemnly, "one time and another. But there's none as goes about to-day to tell what they got by digging."

The unanimity of vague belief that surrounded me was rather impressive; I felt there must surely be *something* at the root of so much conviction, and the already pretty keen curiosity I felt about the real facts of the case was distinctly whetted. If these real facts were to be got from anyone they were to be got from Skelmersdale himself, and I set myself, therefore, still more assiduously to efface my bad first impression and win his confidence to the pitch of voluntary speech. In that endeavour I had a social advantage. Being a person of affability and no apparent employment, and wearing tweeds and knickerbockers, I was naturally classed as an artist in Bignor, and in the remarkable code of social precedence prevalent in Bignor an artist ranks considerably higher than a grocer's assistant. Skelmersdale, like too many of his class, is something of a snob; he had told me to "SHUT it" only under sudden, excessive provocation, and with, I am certain, a subsequent repentance; he was, I knew, quite glad to be seen walking about the village with me. In due course, he accepted the proposal of a pipe and whisky in my rooms readily enough, and there, scenting by some happy instinct



She led him by the hand adown the glade that the glow-worms lit.

that there was trouble of the heart in this, and knowing that confidences beget confidences, I plied him with much of interest and suggestion from my real and fictitious past. And it was after the third whisky of the third visit of that sort, if I remember rightly, that *àpropos* of some artless expansion of a little affair that had touched and left me in my teens, that he did at last of his own free will and motion break the ice. "It was like that with me," he said, "over there at Aldington. It's just that that's so rum. First I didn't care a bit and it was all her, and afterwards when it was too late, it was, in a manner of speaking, all me."

I forbore to jump upon this allusion, and so he presently threw out another, and in a little while he was making it as plain as daylight that the one thing he wanted to talk about now was this Fairyland adventure he had sat tight upon for so long. You see, I'd done the trick with him, and from being just another half-incredulous, would-be facetious stranger, I had, by all my wealth of shameless self-exposure, become the possible confidant. He had been bitten by the desire to show that he, too, had lived and felt many things, and the fever was upon him.

He was certainly confoundedly allusive at first, and my eagerness to clear him up with a few precise questions was only equalled and controlled by my anxiety not to get to this sort of thing too soon. But in another meeting or so the basis of confidence was complete, and from first to last I think I got most items and aspects, indeed, I got quite a number of times over almost everything that Mr. Skelmersdale, with his very limited powers of narration, will ever be able to tell. And so I come to the story of his adventure, and I piece it all together again. Whether it really happened, whether he imagined it or dreamt it, or fell upon it in some strange hallucinatory trance, I do not profess to say. But that he invented it I will not for one moment entertain. The man simply and honestly believes the thing happened as he says it happened, he is transparently incapable of any lie so elaborate and sustained, and in the belief of the simple, yet often keenly penetrating, rustic minds about him I find a very strong confirmation of his sincerity. He believes—and nobody can produce any positive fact to falsify his belief. As for me, with this much of endorsement, I transmit his story—I am a little old now to justify or explain.

He says he went to sleep on Aldington Knoll about ten o'clock one night—it was quite possibly Midsummer night, though he has never thought of the date, and he cannot be sure within a week or so—and it was a fine night and windless, with a rising moon. I have been at the pains to visit this Knoll thrice since his story grew up under my persuasions, and once I went there in the twilight summer moonrise on what was, perhaps, a similar night to that of his adventure. Jupiter was great and splendid above the moon, and in the north and north-west the sky was green and vividly bright over the sunken sun. The Knoll stands out bare and bleak under the sky, but surrounded at a little distance by dark thickets, and as I went up towards it there was a mighty starting and scampering of ghostly or quite invisible rabbits. Just over the crown of the Knoll, but nowhere else, was a multitudinous thin trumpeting of midges. The Knoll is, I believe, an artificial mound, the tumulus of some great prehistoric chieftain, and surely no man ever chose a more spacious prospect for a sepulchre. Eastward one sees along the hills to Hythe, and thence across the Channel to where, thirty miles and more, perhaps, away, the great white lights by Gris Nez and Boulogne wink and pass and shine. Westward lies the whole tumbled valley of the Weald, visible as far as Hindhead and Leith Hill, and the valley of the Stour opens the Downs in the north to interminable hills beyond Wye. All Romney Marsh lies southward at one's feet, Dymchurch and Romney and Lydd, Hastings and its hill are in the middle distance, and the hills multiply vaguely far beyond where Eastbourne rolls up to Beachy Head.

And out upon all this it was that Skelmersdale wandered, being troubled in his earlier love affair, and as he says, "not caring *where* he went." And there he sat down to think it over, and so, sulking and grieving, was overtaken by sleep. And so he fell into the fairies' power.

The quarrel that had upset him was some trivial matter enough between himself and the girl at Clapton Hill to whom he was engaged. She was a farmer's daughter, said Skelmersdale, and "very respectable," and no doubt an excellent match for him, but both girl and lover were very young and with just that mutual jealousy, that intolerantly keen edge of criticism, that irrational hunger

for a beautiful perfection, that life and wisdom do presently and most mercifully dull. What the precise matter of quarrel was I have no idea. She may have said she liked men in gaiters when he hadn't any



"The fairy lady whispered 'Kiss me!' . . And," said Mr. Skelmersdale, "like a fool, I did."

gaiters on, or he may have said he liked her better in a different sort of hat, but however it began it got by a series of clumsy stages to bitterness and tears. She no doubt got tearful and smeary, and he grew dusty and drooping, and she parted with invidious comparisons, grave doubts whether she ever had *really* cared for him, and a clear certainty she would never care again. And with this sort of thing upon his mind he came out upon Aldington Knoll grieving, and presently, after a long interval, perhaps, quite inexplicably, fell asleep.

He woke to find himself on a softer turf than ever he had slept on before, and under the shade of very dark trees that completely hid the sky. Always, indeed, in Fairyland

the sky is hidden, it seems. Except for one night when the fairies were dancing, Mr. Skelmersdale, during all his time with them, never saw a star. And of that night I am in doubt whether he was in Fairyland proper or out where the rings and rushes are, in those low meadows near the railway line at Sneeth.

But it was light under these trees for all that, and on the leaves and amidst the turf shone a multitude of glow-worms, very bright and fine. And Mr. Skelmersdale's first impression was that he was *small*, and the next that quite a number of people still smaller were standing all about him. For some reason, he says, he was neither surprised nor frightened, but sat up quite deliberately and rubbed the sleep out of his eyes. And there all about him stood the smiling elves who had caught him sleeping under their privileges and had brought him into Fairyland.

What these elves were like I have failed to gather, so vague and imperfect is his vocabulary, and so unobservant of all minor detail does he seem to have been. They were clothed in something very light and beautiful, that was neither wool, nor silk, nor leaves, nor the petals of flowers. They stood all about him as he sat and waked, and down the glade towards him, down a glow-worm avenue and fronted by a star, came at once that Fairy Lady who is the chief personage of his memory and tale. Of her I gathered more. She was clothed in filmy green, and about her little waist was a broad silver girdle. Her hair waved back from her forehead on either side; there were curls not too wayward and yet astray, and on her brow was a little tiara, set with a single star. Her sleeves were some sort of open sleeves that gave little glimpses of her arms; her throat, I think, was a little open, because he speaks of the beauty of her neck and chin. There was a necklace of coral about her white throat, and in her breast a coral-coloured flower. She had the soft lines of a little child in her chin and cheeks and throat. And her eyes, I gather, were of a kindled brown, very soft and straight and sweet under her level brows. You see by these particulars how greatly this lady must have loomed in Mr. Skelmersdale's picture. Certain things he tried to express and could not express; "the way she moved," he said several times; and I fancy a sort of demure joyousness radiated from this Lady.

And it was in the company of this delightful person, as the guest and chosen companion of this delightful person, that Mr. Skelmersdale set out to be taken into the intimacies of Fairyland. She welcomed him gladly and a little warmly—I suspect a pressure of his hand in both of hers and a lit face to his. After all, ten years ago young Skelmersdale may have been a very comely youth. And once she took his arm, and once, I think, she led him by the hand adown the glade that the glow-worms lit.

Just how things chanced and happened there is no telling from Mr. Skelmersdale's disarticulated skeleton of description. He gives little unsatisfactory glimpses of strange corners and doings, of places where there were many fairies together, of "toadstool things that shone pink," of fairy food, of which he could only say "you should have tasted it!" and of fairy music, "like a little musical box," that came out of nodding flowers. There was a great open place where fairies rode and raced on "things," but what Mr. Skelmersdale meant by "these here things they rode," there is no telling. Larvæ, perhaps, or crickets, or the little beetles that elude us so abundantly. There was a place where water splashed and gigantic king-cups grew, and there in the hotter times the fairies bathed together. There were games being played and dancing and much elvish love-making, too, I think, among the moss branch thickets. There can be no doubt that the Fairy Lady made love to Mr. Skelmersdale, and no doubt either that this young man set himself to resist her. A time came, indeed, when she sat on a bank beside him, in a quiet secluded place "all smelling of vi'lets," and talked to him of love.

"When her voice went low and she whispered," said Mr. Skelmersdale, "and laid 'er 'and on my 'and, you know, and came close with a soft, warm friendly way she 'ad, it was as much as I could do to keep my 'ead."

It seems he kept his head to a certain limited unfortunate extent. He saw "'ow the wind was blowing," he says, and so, sitting there in a place all smelling of violets, with the touch of this lovely Fairy Lady about him, Mr. Skelmersdale broke it to her gently—that he was engaged!

She had told him she loved him dearly, that he was a sweet human lad for her, and whatever he would ask of her he should have—even his heart's desire.

And Mr. Skelmersdale, who, I fancy, tried hard to avoid looking at her little lips as they just dropped apart and came together, led up to the more intimate question by saying he would like enough capital to start a little shop. "He'd just like to feel," he said, "he had money enough to do that." I imagine a little surprise in those brown eyes he talked about, but she seemed sympathetic for all that, and she asked him many questions about the little shop, "laughing like" all the time. So he got to the complete statement of his affianced position, and told her all about Millie.

"All?" said I.

"Everything," said Mr. Skelmersdale, "just who she was, and where she lived, and everything about her. I sort of felt I 'ad to all the time, I did."

"'Whatever you want you shall have,' said the Fairy Lady. 'That's as good as done. You *shall* feel you have the money just as you wish. And now, you know—*you must kiss me.*'"



"You must go back to your Millie, and here they will give you gold."

And Mr. Skelmersdale pretended not to hear the latter part of her remark and said she was very kind. That he really didn't deserve she should be so kind. And——

The Fairy Lady suddenly came quite close to him and whispered "Kiss me!"

"And," said Mr. Skelmersdale, "like a fool, I did."

There are kisses and kisses, I am told, and this must have been quite the other sort from Millie's resonant signals of regard. There was something magic in that kiss, assuredly it marked a turning point. At any rate, this is one of the passages that he thought sufficiently important to describe most at length. I have tried to get it right, I have tried to disentangle it from the hints and gestures through which it came to me, but I have no doubt that it was all different from my telling and far finer and sweeter, in the soft filtered light and the subtly stirring silences of the fairy glades. The Fairy Lady asked him more about Millie, and was she very lovely, and so on—a great many times. As to Millie's loveliness, I conceive him answering that she was "all right." And then, or on some such occasion, the Fairy Lady told him she had fallen in love with him as he slept in the moonlight, and so he had been brought into Fairyland, and she had thought, not knowing of Millie, that perhaps he might chance to love her. "But now you know you can't," she said, "so you must stop with me just a little while, and then you must go back to Millie." She told him that, and you know Skelmersdale was already in love with her, but the pure inertia of his mind kept him in the way he was going. I imagine him sitting in a sort of stupefaction amidst all these glowing beautiful things, answering about his Millie and the little shop he projected and the need of a horse and cart. . . . And that absurd state of affairs must have gone on for days and days. I see this little lady, hovering about him and trying to amuse him, too dainty to understand his complexity and too tender to let him go. And he, you know, hypnotised as it were by his earthly position, went his way with her hither and thither, blind to everything in Fairyland but this wonderful intimacy that had come to him. It is hard, it is impossible, to give in print the effect of her radiant sweetness shining through the jungle of poor Skelmersdale's rough and broken sentences. To me, at least, she shone clear amidst the muddle of his story like a glow-worm in a tangle of weeds.

There must have been many days of things while all this was happening—and once, I say, they danced under the moonlight in the fairy rings that stud the meadows near Smeeth—but at last it all came to an end. She led him into a great cavernous place, lit by "a red nightlight sort of thing," where there were coffers piled on coffers, and cups and golden boxes, and a great heap of what certainly seemed to all Mr. Skelmersdale's senses—coined gold. There were little gnomes amidst this wealth, who saluted her at her coming, and stood aside. And suddenly she turned on him there with brightly shining eyes.

"And now," she said, "you have been kind to stay with me so long, and it is time I let you go. You must go back to your Millie. You must go back to your Millie, and here—just as I promised you—they will give you gold."

"She choked like," said Mr. Skelmersdale. "At that, I had a sort of feeling——" (he touched his breastbone) "as though I was fainting here. I felt pale, you know, and shivering, and even then—I 'adn't a thing to say."

He paused. "Yes," I said.

The scene was beyond his describing. But I know that she kissed him good-bye.

"And you said nothing?"

"Nothing," he said. "I stood like a stuffed calf. She just looked back once, you know, and stood smiling like and crying—I could see the shine of her eyes—and then she was gone, and there was all these little fellows bustling about me, stuffing my 'ands and my pockets and the back of my collar and everywhere with gold."

And then it was, when the Fairy Lady had vanished, that Mr. Skelmersdale really understood and knew. He suddenly began plucking out the gold they were thrusting upon him, and shouting out at them to prevent their giving him more. "'I don't *want* yer gold,' I said. 'I 'aven't done yet. I'm not going. I want to speak to that Fairy Lady again.' I started off to go after her and they held me back. Yes, stuck their little 'ands against my middle and shoved me back. They kept giving me more and more gold until it was running all down my trouser legs and dropping out of my 'ands. 'I don't *want* yer gold,' I says to them, 'I want just to speak to the Fairy Lady again.'"

"And did you?"

"It came to a tussle."

"Before you saw her?"

"I didn't see her. When I got out from them she wasn't anywhere to be seen."

So he ran in search of her out of this red-lit cave, down a long grotto seeking her, and

thence he came out in a great and desolate place athwart which a swarm of will-o'-the-wisps were flying to and fro. And about him elves were dancing in derision, and the little gnomes came out of the cave after him, carrying gold in handfuls and casting it after him, shouting, "Fairy love and fairy gold! Fairy love and fairy gold!"

And when he heard these words, came a great fear that it was all over, and he lifted up his voice and called to her by her name, and suddenly set himself to run down the slope from the mouth of the cavern, through a place of thorns and briers, calling after her very loudly and often. The elves danced about him unheeded, pinching him and pricking him, and the will-o'-the-wisps circled round him and dashed into his face, and the gnomes pursued him shouting and pelting him with fairy gold. As he ran with all this strange rout about him and distracting him, suddenly he was knee-deep in a swamp, and suddenly he was amidst thick twisted roots, and he caught his foot in one and stumbled and fell. . . .



He sat up at once, and found he was very stiff and cold, and his clothes were damp with dew.

He fell and he rolled over, and in that instant he found himself sprawling upon Aldington Knoll, all lonely under the stars.

He sat up sharply at once, he says, and found he was very stiff and cold, and his clothes were damp with dew. The first

pallor of dawn and a chilly wind were coming up together. He could have believed the whole thing a strangely vivid dream until he thrust his hand into his side pocket and found it stuffed with ashes. Then he knew for certain it was fairy gold they had given him. He could feel all their pinches and pricks still, though there was never a bruise upon him. And in that manner, and so suddenly, Mr. Skelmersdale came out of Fairyland back into this world of men. Even then he fancied the thing was but the matter of a night until he returned to the shop at Aldington Corner and discovered amidst their astonishment that he had been away three weeks.

"Lor! the trouble I 'ad!" said Mr. Skelmersdale.

"How?"

"Explaining. I suppose you've never had anything like that to explain."

"Never," I said, and he expatiated for a time on the behaviour of this person and that. One name he avoided for a space.

"And Millie?" said I at last.

"I didn't seem to care a bit for seeing Millie," he said.

"I expect she seemed changed?"

"Everyone was changed. Changed for good. Everyone seemed big, you know, and coarse. And their voices seemed loud. Why, the sun, when it rose in the morning, fair hit me in the eye!"

"And Millie?"

"I didn't want to see Millie."

"And when you did?"

"I came up against her Sunday, coming out of church. 'Where you been?' she said, and I saw there was a row. *I* didn't care if there was. I seemed to forget about her even while she was there a-talking to me. She was just nothing. I couldn't make out whatever I 'ad seen in 'er ever, or what there could 'ave been. Sometimes when she wasn't about, I did get back a little, but never when she was there. Then it was always the other came up and blotted her out. . . . Any'ow, it didn't break her heart."

"Married?" I asked.

"Married 'er cousin," said Mr. Skelmersdale, and reflected on the pattern of the tablecloth for a space.

When he spoke again it was clear that his former sweetheart had clean vanished from his mind, and that the talk had brought back the Fairy Lady triumphant in his heart. He talked of her—soon he was letting out the oddest things, queer love secrets it would be treachery to repeat. I think, indeed, that was the queerest thing in the whole affair, to hear that neat little grocer man after his story was done, with a glass of whisky beside him and a cigar between his fingers, witnessing, with sorrow still, though now, indeed, with a time-blunted anguish, of the inappeasable hunger of the heart that presently came upon him. "I couldn't eat," he said, "I couldn't sleep. I made mistakes in orders and got mixed with change. There she was day and night, drawing me and drawing me. Oh, I wanted her. Lord! how I wanted her! I was up there, most evenings I was up there on the Knoll, often even when it rained. I used to walk over the Knoll and round it and round it, calling for them to let me in. Shouting. Near blubbering I was at times. Daft I was and miserable. I kept on saying it was all a mistake. And every Sunday afternoon I went up there, wet and fine, though I knew as well as you do it wasn't no good by day. And I've tried to go to sleep there."

He stopped sharply and decided to drink some whisky.

"I've tried to go to sleep there," he said, and I could swear his lips trembled. "I've tried to go to sleep there, often and often. And, you know, I couldn't, sir—never. I've thought if I could go to sleep there, there might be something. . . But I've sat up there and laid up there, and I couldn't—not for thinking and longing. It's the longing. . . . I've tried——"

He blew, drank up the rest of his whisky spasmodically, stood up suddenly and buttoned his jacket, staring closely and critically at the cheap oleographs beside the mantel meanwhile. The little black notebook in which he recorded the orders of his daily round projected stiffly from his breast pocket. When all the buttons were quite done, he patted his chest and turned on me suddenly. "Well," he said, "I must be going."

There was something in his eyes and manner that were too difficult for him to express in words. "One gets talking," he said at last at the door, and smiled wanly, and so vanished from my eyes. And that is the tale of Mr. Skelmersdale in Fairyland just as he told it to me.



THE LATEST AMERICAN "CORNER" AND HOW IT TERMINATED.

By FRANK A. HEDGCOCK. Illustrated by R. W. WALLACE.

THE three greatest financiers in the world were seated round one little table!

Of course, they were Americans. Everyone knows, or if anyone doesn't know, the daily papers will inform one, that only Americans are great financiers; they don't allow anyone else in the business.

They were sitting in an office, also, of course, in Wall Street, New York; for isn't Wall Street the hub of New York, and New York the centre of the universe? Any American will tell you so.

Business, deep, heavy business, was on hand; you could see that by the bottles of champagne and boxes of cigars scattered about in beautiful profusion. Not that there was any ostentation; only your multi-billionaire smokes the best cigars that money can buy from the Tobacco Trust, and drinks the finest brands that the Champagne Trust sends out.

I daresay you have already guessed the names of these three men; they were Morgan Pont, Rockebilt and Vanderfeller. When these three Napoleons of finance—I believe that is the correct synonym for millionaire—forget their rivalry and join forces, something great must be in the air.

And there was!

I have forgotten to mention that with them was that other wonderful man, Van Ericcson, the inventor. He was explaining his new project.

"My idea, gentlemen, is no less a one than to collect the heat of the sun day by day, store it, and sell it at so much a cubic foot."

"Will you give us some details, Van Ericcson?" enquired Mr. Morgan Pont.

"Certainly, sir. The apparatus with which I propose to collect the sun's heat I call my New Patent Soli-caloriolegometer."

"Good name for a Trade Mark," interrupted Vanderfeller.

"It is composed of a number of spherical cylindrical platino-asbestos mirrors, which I shall arrange on hollow towers one hundred feet high. These mirrors are revolved by electricity, and are capable of attracting the sun's rays within a radius of one thousand miles. These rays are reflected down the shaft inside each tower to the special storing tanks, which are filled with a mixture of London fog and pea soup. This liquid is, I find, a magnificent storer for sunlight and heat; no heat or light can possibly pass through it—by the way, you will, of course, interrupt me if I do not make myself plain. This mixture I propose to consolidate, when saturated with the sun's heat, into blocks of convenient size. These we can sell at about five dollars a cubic foot. You put one in your stove, raise it to a temperature of one hundred degrees, when it shines and gives forth heat exactly like the sun itself."

"Won't people think it rather dazzling to have the sun in the stove?" said Rockebilt.

"The heat and light can be graduated by my patent obscurer, and arranged to suit all tastes."

"You see, gentlemen," said Mr. Morgan Pont, "the idea is to work the collecting machines and make a corner in sunlight.

We then put our patent blocks on the market, and the public does the rest."

"I doubt," said Vanderfeller, "if the United States Government will allow us to use these machines in this country. The matter would be costly, anyway."

"That," replied Van Ericeson, "I have provided for. The British Government, at any rate, is unlikely to object to anything. I propose to construct ten great rafts and anchor them fifteen miles off the west coast of Ireland. On each raft we will erect ten of my Soli-caloriolegometers. These will be sufficient to collect all the sunlight in the British Isles, during early spring at least. By the summer we can increase our plant, if necessary."

"I suppose there is no Trust already concerned with the weather in that old country?"

"No, Mr. Vanderfeller; they have, I believe, no trust whatever in the weather. We can, by the means I have outlined, deal a final blow at our almost extinct rival, create a great market for our sunlight blocks, and have a good surplus stock for sale here in the winter."

"And you fancy," said Morgan Pont, "that all these arrangements can be carried out without the British Government objecting?"

"I am quite certain," the inventor replied, "that we can construct our enormous rafts, tow them across the Atlantic, and anchor them near Ireland without the English Government knowing anything of the matter. No doubt, later on, questions will be asked in the House of Commons, but by that time the business will be quite settled, and the British Government, after a few words of regret, will let the whole thing drop."

The conversation then became more technical, and I will not bother the reader with it; it is enough to say that at the end of about half-an-hour—for great financiers make a mere bagatelle of such little deals—the Sunshine Trust was practically formed, with a capital of some hundred billion dollars.

* * *

A day in the middle of May, 19—. Scene: London. May, the month of green trees and budding flowers, the "merry, merry month," is with us.

There are three inches of snow on the ground, and a bitterly cold east wind is blowing. People hurry along, clad in the heaviest of overcoats, and with mufflers wrapped round mouth and nose. And so we've been going on the whole month, so far.

Not that it hasn't been warmer sometimes. The thermometer has even been up to forty degrees occasionally; but this has simply changed the falling snow into heavy rain, and the fallen snow into slush.

The provinces are in the same state. A telegram in the morning papers says: "Snow has been falling heavily in Gloucestershire for the past week. The prospect for fruit this season is not a good one." Communication with the north is interrupted, the snow having broken down the telegraph wires, for which the Post Office is "very sorry."

Turning into one of the London parks, we find a County Council band playing. The bandsmen are muffled up in enormous overcoats; half the band plays while the other half blows on its fingers; I mean its own fingers, not the fingers of the first half. The conductor beats time by swinging his arms round his body, in the manner of a 'bus driver restoring his circulation. But the band evidently gives pleasure to the men who are employed in shovelling up the snow in order to give the spring flowers a chance of appearing.

The English people are beginning to object.

"The man in the tube" (a first cousin of the one in the street) remarks, "I don't want to grumble, but this weather seems a little too bad, even for England. One can't expect warm weather every year, but still it is a trifle monotonous to have winter all the time. I am thinking of moving to Spitzbergen."

The reader has guessed that the dear old climate of England is not entirely responsible for the absence of spring. No; the gigantic Trust is at work. Not satisfied with depriving us of tobacco in our cigarettes and substituting a more modern invention, the Americans have commenced operations on our sunlight.

But has no intelligence reached this country of the true state of affairs? Yes; some months before the *Daily Gale* mentioned that "an influential correspondent who has every opportunity of acquiring correct information" had sent them news of the formation of a gigantic combine to attack the English climate. Questions were asked in the House, but Mr. Balfour replied that the Government had no information on the

subject, and further added that as any attempt to do anything with our weather must obviously end in failure, he did not propose to take any steps in the matter. Next day, replying to a further interrogatory, he said that the Government had had full

Then the great rafts had been towed across the Atlantic by steamers of the new shipping combine and anchored at intervals off the coast of Ireland. The morning papers were full of it; the *Daily Gale* again demanded how far our Government intended



"My idea, gentlemen, is to collect the heat of the sun, store it, and sell it at so much a cubic foot."

and exact intelligence of the scheme some time before, but that it was a purely commercial enterprise, and as whatever changes the Americans might make in our weather could not fail to be for the better, he intended to leave matters as they were.

to go in its policy of muddle and do-nothing; "even when that possession of which every Englishman is so proud, that unique collection of samples, our weather, is assailed, this lethargic Government sits still. We would not demur against the seizure of our fleet

our colonies, or even our politicians, but our weather should indeed be sacred."

The older and more sober papers pooh-poohed all excitement, and the *Daily Paragraph* informed its readers that "We have been told by Mr. Morgan Pont himself that the new trust proposes to deal simply and solely in shrimps; and that the rafts are there to catch them and to pot them by a new process."

But the people of England were growing anxious, and the truth about the Sunshine Trust was gradually leaking out. Plans for importing sunshine in steel retorts from the Colonies did little to relieve the anxiety, and as the days went by and the weather grew steadily worse, a feeling of despair settled down on the whole community.

* * *

I was walking up and down the front at Brighton. It was the second week in July, but I had my winter clothes on, and walked briskly along the snow-covered sea-wall in order to keep my blood in circulation. Gazing south, I saw a bilious-looking sea rolling its foaming billows 'neath a livid sky, to dash on a strand which no ray of sunshine brightened. On the land side the heavy clouds swept away over the tops of the houses, and not one rift in them gave promise of any attempt on the sun's part to break through the pall.

In the far west one might discern what looked like a broad ribbon of distant light descending from the heavens and vanishing into the sea.

Small groups of people occasionally gathered to discuss this appearance, and it was said to be formed by the sun's rays attracted to Van Ericcson's great Soli-cal-oriolegometers off Ireland.

I remember it was exactly midday when a distant rumble was heard, which gradually swelled into a mighty roar. Again it was repeated, evidently arising from the west; again and again the terrifying shocks shook the ground and turned everyone's face white with fear. I counted ten distinct reports.

Then, suddenly, the scene grew brighter. Scarcely believing their eyes, men gazed at the moving clouds. They parted, they burst asunder, and—oh, glorious sight!—the broad disc of the golden sun, that sun we hardly recognised after its long absence, sprang out and once more shone upon us.

"Hurrah, hurrah!" cried a paper-boy who was standing near me, and he boisterously slapped me on the back, a familiarity which I by no means resented, but responded to by wringing his hand warmly. People now poured out of the houses, and soon the Front was packed with dense crowds, who shouted, danced and sang "God Save the King" at the top of their voices; while a man with a cornet, who played "Rule Britannia" horribly out of tune, reaped quite a harvest of coppers.

Evidently something had gone wrong with the Sunshine Trust; its machinations had somehow been defeated. Rumours were going round of a ring of English capitalists who were running a counter-scheme, while others reported that the Government had at last summoned up courage enough to send torpedo boats to blow up the great rafts; but these latter reports were scarcely credited.

Later on telegrams began to arrive, and more light than the sun could give us was thrown on the situation. But it was not till the next morning that the truth was fully known. Even then only that enterprising paper, the *Daily Gale*, professed to be able to give full details of the disaster.

"Our Own Special Correspondent" at Ballyslush, North Ireland, reported as follows:—

"I have just returned from interviewing the only known survivor of the great explosion which occurred yesterday off what was the West Coast of Ireland. He is an American, though of Hibernian descent, his name being O'Flannagan, and he held the position of sub-chief-deputy-inspector on Raft No. 6 of the Soli-caloriolegometer Co., U.S. This gentleman arrived in our city at 12.32 p.m. yesterday on top of a mass of rock weighing about twenty tons. He was picked up unconscious, but was soon revived by the administration of a stiff dose of 'real Irish.' Being on the spot, I proceeded, at his own request, to interview him, and give you the story as told by himself:

"'I am an American, and was, till yesterday, the sub-chief-deputy-inspector of Raft No. 6 of the Soli-caloriolegometer Co. At twelve o'clock midday yesterday I was on duty on the maindeck, my work being to keep an eye on the men employed to filter the sunlight as it passed down our collecting towers, and keep it free from germs, bacilli, etc. My attention was called to some unusual proceeding on the mainland, and directing my binoculars

on the spot referred to, I soon discovered that a battery of Artillery from the barracks at Gillhooly was about to begin firing, obviously for practice. I may explain that our raft at this time was quite full of sunlight blocks, as we were expecting the collecting steamer from New York in a day or two. Now, although our rafts were constructed in such a way as to minimise the effects of the friction caused by the motion of the sea, I



It was the second week in July, but I had my winter clothes on, and walked briskly along the snow-covered sea front to keep my blood in circulation. In the far west one might discern a broad ribbon of light descending from the heavens and vanishing into the sea.



A moment after a blinding flash of light rose from her deck, followed by a crash like the crack of doom.

well knew what the result would be if the atmosphere were suddenly agitated by the discharge of artillery. Hastily communicating with my chief, I had the electric launch lowered and hastened to the shore. I had hoped to reach the land before the battery opened fire; and I did so, in fact, but had hardly set foot on the beach when I heard the heavy boom of the guns on the cliff above me. I ran up the steep approach, hoping that all might yet be well. But just as I reached the rock on which the soldiers were drawn up, I heard an ominous rumbling. Turning seawards I saw our raft trembling and tossing at her moorings. A moment after a blinding flash of light rose from her deck, followed by a crash like the crack of doom; heaven and earth seemed to rush together; I felt myself flying skyward, and remember no more until I found myself in your hospitable city. Pass the whisky, please.'"

The correspondent went on to give his own theory of the accident, with which I will not trouble the reader. 'There seems little doubt that the shock of the artillery firing had thrown some of the sun-blocks together. The heat thus generated had caused the whole mass to explode, and the air was so agitated that the other rafts had been affected in their turn. They had blown up, one after the other, with a tremendous report, loud enough to be heard in New York and Calcutta. And the gigantic explosion had, curiously enough, helped England out of two difficulties. First, the great American combination was destroyed, and a tremendous blow dealt to the millionaire ring, since not only was the money loss large, but the inventor himself had perished, and this money loss affected their other enterprises as well; and secondly, the whole of western and central Ireland had been blown to atoms, thus simplifying the problem of Home Rule to a great extent. But the wonderful destruction caused and the alteration of the face of Nature are matters of history, with which I need not deal.

"We should be profoundly thankful for this great deliverance, Mrs. Brown," said I to my landlady, as she brought in the eggs and bacon next morning.

"Yes, sir, we should indeed," she replied. "There'll be fine weather for the August Bank Holiday after all."

And there was.



A SCIENTIFIC ROMANCE.

By GEO. C. WALLIS. Illustrated by R. W. WALLACE.

I.—SIGNS IN THE SKY.

"IT'S queer," said Harrison, resting his elbows on the table meditatively. "The scientific world has been living for years in the comfortable belief that Kepler's and Newton's laws were inviolable, and that predicting the places of the planets at any instant was only a matter of correct calculation—and all at once some of the planets get hundreds of miles out of their track. Either Kepler and Newton were wrong, or something very strange has happened to the poor old Solar System."

We were in Harrison's private observatory waiting for the sky to clear. I lit a cigar carelessly.

"Let's hear the details," I said. "I must confess I've been too busy with other things lately to have time to read up the technical papers. Seems to be a big fuss about things, anyhow."

"Big fuss! I should think so—and there will be a bigger one still if this sort of thing goes on. When the Solar System begins to get behind schedule time, it's serious. It's been going on for over a week now. Only last night Saturn was about a whole degree behind his proper place. Uranus was even more, and as for Neptune we've had to re-discover him. To tell you the truth, Milford, I'm getting a bit scared. According to all long-established mathematical law, any such perturbation of the planetary movements would have a great effect on the orbit of the earth, would perhaps—nay, almost certainly—so upset the balance of the Solar System that it would go to everlasting smash. But the earth hasn't budged an inch out of her way, nor Mars, nor Jupiter—at least, we gave him the benefit of the doubt over the last observation—and here are the outer planets slowing down. Why, with their loss of momentum, they don't fall into the sun, I can't make out. And everything else, so far, seems as per usual. It looks to me as though we were being held back from chaos by a bond that might break at any time. And now you know as much as I do, and I hope you'll get to sleep to-morrow."

"Daresay I shall," I answered. The news did not seem so terrible to me as to Harrison and the other astronomers, who saw its significance with scientific eyes. "The sky looks pretty much the same to us ordinary mortals, and will do to the end, I expect, no matter what extraordinary things are going on. But it's getting clearer. Let's have a peep. What's on view?"

"There are hundreds of telescopes at work now," said Harrison, thoughtfully, unscrewing a cap as he spoke. "We've arranged a plan of campaign between us—a sort of bureau of celestial information—and I'm one of about twenty who have been deputed to watch Mars. If he varies a millimetre from his expected position, I have to wire it to the exchange. He's in the field now, and both moons are just visible. Bend down."

I placed my left, and strongest, eye to the bright dot of light at the end of the long tube, and saw the ruddy planet with its two small moons. I saw the familiar cloudy markings, the well-known snow-patches at the poles, and fancied that I detected, even as I looked, the movement of rapid Phobos—that active little satellite which contrived to get round Mars in less than eight hours. I was very interested at first, as I have always been in telescopic views, but soon grew tired of the constrained position, and

made way for Harrison. He was busy with observations and calculations for some time, and at last he looked up with something like a sigh of relief.

"Mars all right, then?"

"Yes. He's exactly where he ought to be. I'll wire to the exchange now, if you don't mind waiting, and see if they have any news of Jupiter."

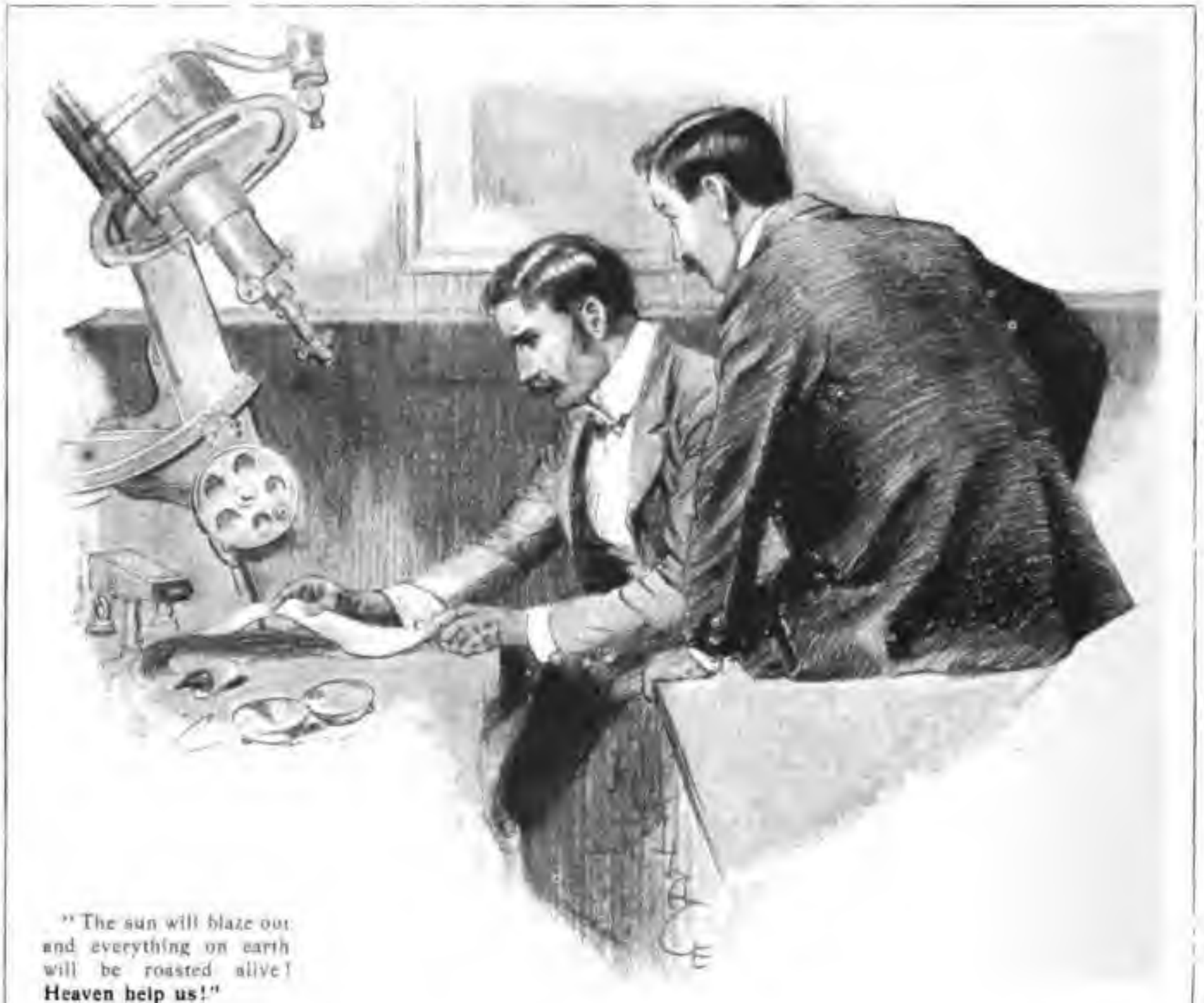
The clicking of the Morse code was very distinct in the dim observatory, as I bent down and peered through the tube once more. Active little Phobos was at that moment at greatest elongation. I had been looking perhaps a minute when the tiny moon suddenly blazed out with an intense white light. Thus luminous, it lasted several seconds, then it incontinently and utterly disappeared. I gave a startled exclamation, and at the same moment Harrison turned from the telegraph with a scared and puzzled expression:

"It's worse than ever," he said, before I had time to speak. "Jupiter is three minutes of arc behind his place, and the principal Asteroids are slowing down. What did you say?"

I told him briefly. He looked eagerly up the tube. The light of a great fear—that fear which was so soon to come into all faces—shone in his eyes.

"Good heavens, Milford, what next? This is no mere cause for wonder, it is something strange and terrible. Some unknown, stupendous influence is at work in the Solar System, and God only knows what will be the end."

Then with a sudden change of manner he bustled round the room, put his paraphernalia back into their place, and said we had better go indoors and get some sleep. He talked wildly, and not a little incoherently, I thought, as we walked up the silent drive and across the lawn. I was not sorry when I found myself dozing off to sleep in bed. There was a sense of practical security between the



"The sun will blaze out and everything on earth will be roasted alive! Heaven help us!"

white sheets. Yet I often thought afterwards of his talk that night as almost prophetic.

For a week things went on as usual. The scientific world was distraught with wonder, and a multiplicity of hypotheses to account for the action of the outer planets and the burning-up and disappearance of Phobos, but the average crowd went about their business without much concern.

Then the message from Mars came, and theory gave way to fact, and the popular indifference to a reign of terror that shook the fabric of civilisation to its base.

II.—THE MESSAGE FROM MARS.

By what means the Martian intelligences despatched their tiny projectiles across the abyss of space with such accuracy we shall never know, nor shall we ever know what those intelligences were like. We only know that they must have been thousands of years in advance of us in knowledge and in power, almost god-like in the latter, and altruistic to a degree which our lower minds cannot comprehend. We only know that their message came in a number of small, metallic balls, which fell to earth like meteors on the night of August 5th and the following day.

So accurately timed and speeded were these messengers of the peril that they fell at nearly regular distances apart, and with such motion as to bring them to the ground without being fused by the friction of the atmosphere. Many, no doubt, fell into the seas and rivers and deserts; many have been found since in all kinds of out-of-the-way places; but one and all contained similar contents. These consisted of a tightly-rolled drum of a substance not unlike parchment and a few grains of a greyish powder.

Many of these metallic messengers fell into scientific hands on the morning of the 6th, and the whole world knew their purport on the 7th. Every telegraph wire carried the dread news; every paper had articles upon the subject; it was everywhere the chief topic of conversation. One fell into the lane at the back of Harrison's house, and was found accidentally by Harrison himself. We deciphered its meaning together the same afternoon, and wired it to the Press Agencies.

The day before I should have been amused at the idea of any ultra-terrestrial intelligences communicating with us, seeing that we could have no common basis of agreement as to the meaning of signs, but the Martians compelled me to confess my dull wit. The method used was at once simple and convincing.

The first thing that came into view as we unrolled the drum of parchment was a marvellously accurate map of the Solar System, so intricate in detail as to force an exclamation of wonder and praise from Harrison at first sight. On this map Mars was marked with a peculiar sign, resembling a Maltese cross. A number of lines were drawn from Mars to the earth when each were at different points of their orbits—points which Harrison quickly marked with their respective dates—and, on the date on which we had witnessed the disappearance of Phobos, a line was drawn from the surface of Mars to the place of its small satellite, and for the satellite itself was substituted a splash of pale blue colour.

"Then it was the Martians who destroyed Phobos by some terrible projectile or exercise of force?" I cried.

Harrison nodded gravely.

"Yes. Evidently to attract our attention or to make an experiment. But look at this!—look at this! Do you see what it means?"

The unrolled drum now disclosed a map of much larger dimensions, on which the sun and some of the nearer stars were represented by tiny dots. We knew the sun again by the recurrence of the mark attached to it in the former map. Between the star *a* in Cassiopeia and our own sun, a small cloud of tiny objects (marked with a sign identical with that used to denote the Leonids and other meteor-streams of the Solar System) was shown, whose indicated orbit was directed straight to the sun. This cloud of meteors was marked with two distinctive signs.

"It means, I expect," said I, "that a large cloud of meteors is coming towards us from the direction of Cassiopeia, and so—but don't look scared, man—an extra grand display of celestial fireworks will be a compensation for the disappointment of two Novembers ago!"

My friend pulled himself together with a visible effort, but his voice trembled a little as he said:

"You don't see all I see in this. Do you think the Martians would have taken all this trouble just to warn us of the approach of an ordinary meteor swarm? No—this is a

warning of world-peril—so far as I can see, a sentence of death for all humanity."

He paused a moment; then continued, growing calmer gradually:

"You will notice that the orbit of this meteor cloud does not start in Cassiopeia but is prolonged indefinitely beyond. This suggests that in order for the Martians to have traced its backward way so far it must be of a size and density unparalleled within our knowledge. Here is the next map conveying that precise information. Here is the Solar System again, bounded by a circular line; here is the meteor cloud with a circle of the same size drawn *within* it. Here is part of its orbit, marked off with a succession of regular ticks, each tick representing, I think, the distance travelled by the stream in a Martian year. A little calculation will settle that point. . . . Yes, I am right. And here is the last Martian year period marked off into ten minor divisions—they must use the decimal system on Mars—and this tells us that in six weeks from to-night the great stream will be passing our system, scorching us all to death by the heat evolved by the impact of its mass upon the sun. The sun will blaze out like the famous star in Corona Borealis did, and every living thing on earth will be roasted alive! Heaven help us, Milford!"

A half-jesting doubt of the truth of his deductions was upon my lips, but I looked at the maps again and saw that he was right, read thereon the sentence of death in indisputable language. The silent but eloquent dots and lines and marks seemed to dance before my eyes like fantastic figures of fire. I did not speak, and we unrolled the drum of parchment to the end.

III.—DAYS OF DESPAIR.

The twilight shadows were creeping across the floor of the study when we re-wound the parchment and looked straight into each other's haggard eyes. The further maps and diagrams confirmed and reiterated beyond dispute our worst conjectures, besides being an evident attempt to convey some more information to us—information which, at that time, we completely failed to comprehend.

On a series of Solar maps a great quantity of lines were drawn from Mars to the outer planets, at times and distances easily calculated to be those of the retardations which had so exercised the wonder of the astronomers. That these retardations had been purposely achieved by the Martians, with a definite object in view, we had no room for doubt; that the Martians had solved the problem of the nature and control of gravitation, we were compelled to believe. All the indirect evidence of their existence and intelligence which had been so suddenly thrust upon us, enforced these points. But what bearing this knowledge, or the knowledge of the coming death, was expected to have upon earthly behaviour, we could not even dimly guess. That something more than a mere warning was intended, we felt sure; what it was, we had no idea.

We found our knowledge and our ignorance alike shared by all the competent students into whose possession the message came. One curious point was noted by all of us, though none then divined its true significance. On the map which represented the meteor stream infringing on the Solar System, the earth, Mars, and the four great outer planets, were shown to be in a direct line between the sun and centre of the great stream.

I parted from Harrison quietly—we felt that ordinary, commonplace sentences were all we dare use just then—and made my way home. It was a clear, warm night, already glowing with faint stars. They seemed to me as still, as steadfast, as prophetic of long endurance, as they have done to man for countless years, though I knew their seeming steadfastness was but a mask of mockery. As I turned the handle of the garden gate I remembered that I was due out that evening, and had no time to spare if I would be punctual. And hitherto I had been punctuality itself where Ethel was concerned. I hurriedly made myself fashionable, and went.

There came an interval in the evening's mirth when Ethel and I found ourselves alone on the balcony we knew so well. The stars were more numerous now, and shone radiantly. A few clouds were creeping up out of the west. The landscape spread out before us down to the river was covered with overlapping shadows. For a few minutes I debated with myself whether or not I should tell Ethel the awful news that would blight for her eyes, as it had done for mine, all the beauty of this quiet scene. If I did not tell her, she would read it in the papers to-morrow.

"Well, Jack," she said at last, breaking the thread of my unpleasant cogitations, "have you turned miserly all at once?

'Silence is golden' you know! It must be something *very* serious to make *you* so solemn!"

"That is true enough"—with the ghost of a smile—"I am frivolous enough, I admit, in a usual way. But 'tis nothing that concerns you—at least—that is, you will hear of it soon enough."

"Hear of what, Jack? I shall not be friends until you tell me all about it—whatever it is—that's troubling you."

"I'd better not," I began, weakly; but a moment later I was launched upon the strange recital. I told her the whole story, omitting nothing, and grew marvellously scientific, even eloquently philosophical, with the intensity of my emotion. As I spoke I looked at the stars and the dark landscape, and when I finished and turned to Ethel I found her gaze fixed upon my face with a very curious expression. She took the tidings calmly.

"If this is true, Jack," she said. "I mean, if you and Harrison are not the victims of a dreadful joke—or the originators of one—it will be confirmed by the great scientific men of the world to-morrow or the following day. Then we shall know; until then, let us dismiss the subject. We have heard so many predictions of universal disaster that have come to nothing."

There was no getting the better of Ethel in an argument of this sort, so after a feeble protest I gave way. I even felt a sense of relief in the temporary casting-off of the yoke of terror. "Sufficient unto the day" seemed to me a very good maxim just then. Yet when we parted at the door Ethel grew serious.

"If it *should* be true, Jack," she said, holding my hand tightly, "will you come on and see me as soon as you can? And will you let me see one of these dreadful messages?"

I gave her the required promises readily, a thrill of pleasure running through the sighings of despair, and went home strangely placid. I had been engaged to Ethel for over a year, but until that night I had never known the depth of her love for me. It was strange. I, one of the few sharers of the secret of universal and imminent doom, was glad because a girl, one of the doomed—a mere ephemera who had not seven weeks to live—was more in love with me than I had thought.

But next morning the flood of gloom was upon me again, and upon all who believed.



"But our duties and our love remain the same, Jack."

After a brief call at Harrison's, I was at Ethel's home. It was early, but she met me in the drawing-room, a newspaper in her hand, a pallor on her sweet face.

"It is true, after all," she said.

"Yes," said I, "it's true. And what's the good of anything now? What does anything matter? Only a few weeks, and all the world, and you, and I, will be wiped out of existence as thoroughly as wrong figures on a schoolboy's slate."

"Yes, but our duties and our love remain the same, Jack. Whether we die to-morrow or fifty years hence does not matter at all. Whether we live well *now*, whether we love well *now*, matters everything. It is only weak souls who are slaves to time. You know the lines:

> We should count time by heart-throbs, not by hours,
> By feelings, not by figures on a dial."

"Of course you are right, Ethel," I said, gloomily, "but I am a mere, prosaic, modern man, unable, I fear, to soar to the heights of your transcendentalism. There is something unspeakably terrible to me in the thought of what is coming—that in seven weeks from now the world will be a scorched and lifeless ember; that all that men have striven after, and achieved and hoped for through countless generations, will be utterly wasted and lost."

"It is terrible to me, too, Jack, but we must not let it overmaster us. We must work. There will be plenty to do for all who can keep cool heads, and we shall face the end better if we do not anticipate it."

She spoke bravely, firing with enthusiasm. I felt a little cheered for the moment, but once out in the street again despair settled over me the deeper. And as the days wore on and the awful truth—confirmed by another corroborative message from Mars—gradually percolated through the meshes of ignorance and doubt, reaching to the lowest substratum of society and to the most remote corners of the earth, that despair settled over most men. But for the almost automatic instinct of law and order that upheld the Governments, and the heroism that the peril called forth from many natures such as Ethel's, civilisation would have gone to ruin long before the fatal day.

Who that was not forced would work against his will, with that dread shadow ever creeping nearer? Who would save, who respect any law but the law of strength, who paint, or write, or speak, or strive for fame or honour when in six weeks all must die?

The first days of the dread suspense have well been called the days of desolation. Many went mad in them, many died of fright or by self-destruction, many made fortunes at which their neighbours laughed, many lost their all and lived on charity, caring nothing. But many were mentally sober yet, and worked on.

IV.—A CLEFT IN THE CLOUDS.

At the end of the first week mankind was divided into three factions — those who believed in the approaching catastrophe and were afraid; those who believed and were not afraid; and those who did not believe. The latter faction was a very small one, although it included some clever men. They spoke and wrote eloquently and scoffingly of antecedent improbabilities, universal experience, illusions, gigantic hoaxes, and the like. Their jests fell on heedless ears. One faction was too terrified to reason, to refute, to reprove; the other was too feverishly intent upon the daily work that casts out fear. And some, gay and reckless, were too busy making the most, in a frivolous sense, of the short time that remained to them.

You heard many grim jokes as you went along the streets. You saw men, for once, in their true colours. The churches and chapels and mission rooms were crowded nightly with fervent and trembling audiences, listening now to the preacher with an attention before unknown. And now the preacher had a theme that appealed to all. As in the days of old, he pointed his perorations with a fiery moral, this time drawing from science his picture of the end of the world. The drum of the Salvation Army rolled incessantly in the streets, and at nearly every corner and crossing you heard the cries of modern Solomon Eagles: "Repent, repent, ere it be too late, generation of sinners!" Faces blanched with terror as the once unheeded words fell on their ears: "The earth shall be melted with fervent heat and the heavens be rolled together like a scroll." And on the other hand you heard the calm, dispassionate reasonings of the Rationalists and Determinists. Their arguments penetrated the fever heat of fear as icicles of impersonal logic. They strove to drive home the lesson that here was one more proof of the fact that the inexorable workings of Nature give

no sanction to man's anthropomorphic imaging of the Unknowable God.

The air was full of strange theories and queer suggestions. The intellect of all humanity was at work on the one absorbing problem. Up at Harrison's one evening, whither I had taken Ethel to see the Martian messages, we were talking of these things.

"Have you heard Schiaparelli's latest?" enquired Harrison, picking up a copy of the *British Mechanic* and glancing at a paragraph. "It's a daring idea, but has its merits. He calculates the sweep of the meteoric orbit from the portion shown to us on the Martian maps, and together with that, and the rate at which the stream is travelling, deduces the conclusion that it completes a circuit once in 20,000,000 of our years. That being so, the meteors must have passed through our system and enriched and superheated the sun 20,000,000 years ago, and at similar periods for who knows how far back? And you know Kelvin's estimate of the sun's present age—20,000,000 years. If Schiaparelli is right, the sun is constantly cooling and yet continually being revived by the impact of this immense stream of matter. This also suggests an argument in favour of the meteoritic origin of the Solar System, as against the old nebular hypothesis."

"It is a clever thought," said Ethel, "but then, you know, Kelvin's estimate is not a proved fact—it was seriously questioned by Proctor—and the ascertaining of a 20,000,000-year orbit is a very delicate matter indeed."

"Yes," said Harrison. "And another thing. The theory requires a very large body at or near the centre of the alleged orbit, and no visible star happens to be there. Of course, there may be one of the dark, burnt-out suns in that position—and equally, of course, there may not."

"Just so," said I. "And after all, it does not matter, because we shall never know."

"Of course not," said Harrison, gravely. "But if Professor Belmont's idea is right, *that* will matter a great deal."

"And that is —— ?"

"That the Martians intend to ward off the catastrophe by some means," my friend replied. "I will read you Belmont's summing-up from the *Scientific American*: 'That the Martians intended to convey to us more than the mere fact of the approach of the meteor-stream, no one who has seen the messages doubts. That this something more is an intimation that they will endeavour to prevent the disaster, seems to me equally beyond dispute. We know that they are retarding the outer planets—and now the earth and Venus and Mars itself—so as to bring all the planets in a right line between the centre of the sun and the centre of the meteor-stream at the time it will pass through and around the Solar System. On the map which conveys this information we find lines drawn from Mars to the outer planets, each line marked with a sign, and terminating in a sign, identical with the signs on the map marking the destruction of Phobos. The one spectroscopic observation of that destruction which we possess shows that a mass of pure hydrogen of immense volume was suddenly fired. This cannot have been sent from Mars; we can only account for it by supposing that the Martians—who, we know, can control gravitation—know the nature of the primeval element out of which all our so-called elements are formed, and can transmute these "elements" at their will; that, in fact, by means incomprehensible to us, they dissolved the whole mass of Phobos into incandescent hydrogen.

'The conclusion seems forced upon one that at the instant of impact they will similarly dissolve Neptune, Uranus, Saturn, and Jupiter, thus opposing the central portion of the meteor-stream with a succession of flaming hydrogen shields, in passing through which the meteors will be fused, and dissipated into cosmic dust. That the grains of grey powder in the Martian messages were intended for us to prove their accuracy with, seems convincingly shown by the fearful explosions which have taken place in the laboratories, because after each explosion the presence of a large body of hydrogen has been detected in the vicinity.

'Thus much appears certain. It is too daring to go further and affirm that the last map of the series suggests the possible self-destruction of Mars (and of the earth also, we being supposed to have learned the nature of the grey powder) should the hydrogenising of the outer planets prove insufficient? With the Martian message before me, I affirm that such is my belief.'"

"Feasible, is it not?" added Harrison.

"Quite," said I, "except the last suggestion. That seems too terrible, unless we

suppose the Martians to have reached such a pitch of intelligence as to feel no repugnance at the idea of a world-suicide."

"May there not be another explanation?" asked Ethel, quietly. "It is evident that they are aware intelligences exist here. May not their intentional destruction of their own planet make the last flame-shield necessary to save *us* from death? May it not indicate a contemplated act of supreme self-sacrifice on the part of a race — a world?"

We sat still awhile, silently digesting the strange, new thought. Then Harrison cried:

"That shall be in all the leading papers to-morrow!"

V.—THE FLASHES OF FLAME.

Some other pen than mine must write the full story of those days of waiting, those days of drawn and agonised suspense. I lived my life in a very narrow sphere. Excepting at the house where I lodged, Ethel's and Harrison's, I spoke to very few people. Yet what I saw and read impressed upon me so vivid and terrible a picture of a world under sentence of death, gone mad with fear, that even now it colours all my dreams with a nameless horror.



"Repent! Repent! Ere it be too late."

But for the hint of hope conveyed in Belmont's theory and Ethel's now famous suggestion, I believe that mankind would have gone mad *en masse*, wrecked every institution of society that makes for order, and reverted to barbarism. As it was, the strain of alternate hope and fear showed itself in all faces, in all words, in all acts. Politics and business, peace and war, love and sport, travel and invention, all sank into sudden insignificance. Towards the end of the last week of security all supplies except the staples of life fell off alarmingly, even at panic prices. No one travelled except those who must, or those who hurried home from distant places. The cry of every human heart was for the presence of those dear to him in the last, dreaded hours.

The churches throughout the world announced that they would hold services with open doors on the last day, and two-thirds of the literature that poured from the world's printing presses consisted of sermons, exhortations, warnings, and words of supposed comfort put forth on behalf of the various religions which sway humanity. The Buddhist spoke resignedly of the peace of Nirvana (for even to India's millions the truth had reached); the Moslem, kneeling barefooted in the mosque, grew fervent over the joys of Paradise; the Catholic told his beads and prayed to the Holy Mother; the Protestant foresaw the nearness of the Second Coming; the Theist and Rationalist, with ideas broadened by the great conception of the vastness and unity and incomprehensibility of Nature, preached only courage and calmness, pleading that men should act a man's part even in the darkest hour, no matter whether a further lease of mortal life, or glory inconceivable, or death eternal, awaited all.

And there were some who rushed into

more violent excesses of frivolity, debauchery and crime than even Rome knew in her most degenerate days. The lower class of theatres and music halls were filled nightly with reckless crowds; and despite the efforts of the military and police, forcible robberies and other worse deeds were enacted daily in the dark corners of great cities and on desolate country roads.

Fortunately the great mass of the people, especially in the stolid, English-speaking countries, contained themselves admirably, neither evincing any spirit of superhuman heroism nor of sub-human despair. The sky was black enough, no doubt, but plenty of time for "the panic of wild affright" when the storm burst. There was yet a gleam of hope shining.

The moment of contact between the meteor-stream and Neptune arrived at last. For some nights previously we had fine displays of shooting stars — the advance guard of the great group—which struck fresh terror into the minds of the ignorant, and now was the time to verify Belmont's hypothesis. Harrison and I were alone in the observatory once more, waiting in the small hours for the sign that should confirm what we both believed.

Harrison was at the eye-piece; I was wondering why, on so clear a night, we had seen fewer meteors than on the two previous evenings. Suddenly my friend uttered an exclamation of relief and seized my arm.

"Look—quick! It is true! The Martians are at work!"

I glanced through the dark tube, and saw where the tiny point of Neptune should have shone, a small cloud of intensely vivid light —the light of incandescent hydrogen. Belmont's reading of the Martian message was correct; the intelligences that inhabited the ruddy planet, superior to us in intellect and in power, were fighting the great peril. Knowing by means we cannot even guess that the earth held intelligences also, they had warned us of the peril and of their attempt to avert it. The thought, although familiar enough now, came home to me with fresh force, with an almost staggering greatness—was almost too large for a human brain to grasp, otherwise than as a wildly-impossible dream. Yet it was true.

I moved aside for Harrison to look once more, but in a little over ten minutes the cloud dimmed and disappeared. How many millions of meteors had been fused into cosmic dust in their headlong rush through that shield of flaming hydrogen? How many millions came after them, with shape and motion unimpaired? How many millions? —how many trillions of trillions!

We busied ourselves with the telegraph as the cloud vanished, sending and receiving news. We learnt that the spectroscope showed the flame of Neptune's destruction to be the flame of almost pure hydrogen, and that it was of immense volume. News of the destruction of Uranus came from the European observatories some days later, with the determination of the speed of the great meteor-stream and the fixing of the dates when it would reach the earth and the sun respectively. Saturn's annihilation was invisible everywhere, owing to heavy clouds, but the hydrogenising of the mighty mass of Jupiter was visible to the naked eye. To Harrison and me, sweeping the sky with the telescope, the sight was one never to be forgotten.

A straggling meteor shot through the field of view a moment prior to the predicted time, and the luminous trail in its wake had scarcely vanished when the huge globe of the giant planet seemed to melt into nothingness before our gaze. A moment's blank. Then, in place of the round orb, a swiftly expanding cloud of flame shone, glowing as with the sustained blast of a furnace, shooting out fierce red tongues of fire round all its jagged and increasing circumference, glittering with a thousand points of yet intenser flame, as though riddled through and through with a torrent of stars.

The cloud of flame endured for more than half-an-hour, and in every second of that time it was swallowing in its capacious maw myriads upon myriads of groups of those restless, hurrying enemies of ours, fusing them with the furnace heat of friction into harmless dust. The grey dawn stole across the sky shortly after the cloud became invisible. We felt a thrill of hope now that we were sure those Martian intelligences were fighting so bravely for us and for themselves. Yet whether we were saved we did not know. The peril was not yet past. The stress of suspense was not yet over.

VI.—THE SUPREME SACRIFICE.

It was late in the afternoon, and the whole sky was growing dull with the approach of twilight, when Ethel and I walked together to my friend's house. She could not rest at

home, she said, waiting to know the end, and I was more than willing that she should be with me in the moment when the nature of that end should be known for good and all. After that supreme moment, whether the verdict was life or death, I had promised to return home with her. In the last hours we would be together.

On our way we met and passed many people. Their faces reflected all the shades of fear, from dim doubt to wild terror. Some walked defiantly, some furtively, some with affected unconcern, but we did not see one face that betokened real carelessness or suggested real composure. One group we passed at the corner of a street were indeed singing and praying and preaching loudly, and called to us to join them, but the scared expression in their eyes—red with want of sleep, with long and anxious vigils at bedroom windows, repeated studies of the dangerous sky — belied the complacency they professed and offered. Sadly shaking off the nervous hands that one zealot laid upon us, we hurried on.

Harrison and his wife greeted us briefly but sincerely, and the four of us went straight to the garden seat near the open door of the observatory. If the calculations of the astronomers were correct, we should receive news of the great issue from Greenwich in a quarter of an hour. As Greenwich time is about five hours in advance of American Eastern time, we should have to wait that period for a distinct observation of Mars ourselves. As the minutes were counted off and the telegraph instrument gave no sign, the tension drew its cords tightly around us.

Save for a few drifting clouds, the sky was dark and clear and cold; the air was still; the whole world about us seemed plunged into waiting silence. We were each loth to break the spell of that hush, and sat apart, busy with our own thoughts. I remember that I was thinking something like this: The Martians, besides having control of gravitation, must have means of knowing the total amount of matter in the meteor cloud. Knowing that, and how much of it they have destroyed already, they will know whether what yet remains is sufficient to raise the sun's heat beyond the point fatal to life. They must also know if the hydrogenising of their own planet would avert the calamity, and so save the earth and the inner planets. If Mars is hydrogenised, it will mean that such is the case; if he is not, it will mean that even Martian intelligence is beaten and that only universal death remains. I also remember wondering whether any of the Martians would try to escape from the ruin of their world and come to earth, as Wells's Martians did.

I was roused from my reverie by Harrison shutting his chronometer with a snap. The time had expired and the wire had not spoken. Mars yet existed.

"We will wait a little longer," said Ethel, very quietly, but with pale face. "The calculations may be in error or the sky cloudy in Europe. Until we have seen Mars with our own eyes we will not go home. And it may be that the danger is really past—that the meteors have already been reduced in number below the danger point."

"That might be so, but I do not think the Martians, knowing the approximate mass of the meteors, would have sent us any message in that case. For my part I go further than Belmont now. I believe that they foresaw the need of self-sacrifice and contemplated it from the first, only sending us the message to suggest the same self-destruction to us, in the event of their calculations proving in error or the hydrogen shields not fusing sufficient of the meteors. The balance of mass between death and life for us may be—I think it is—very fine now, and we may yet see what we want. They may be delaying their own destruction because of a concentration of the meteors in the tail of the stream. We will wait, as Miss Holroyd suggests, until we have seen Mars himself."

We waited, and the sky darkened swiftly. An hour later a brilliant meteor shot across the sky. After a short interval it was followed by another, and they by others, until the heavens seemed riven by myriads of lances of fire.

"The meteors—the harbingers of death!" cried Ethel, her hands locked in silent prayer. We looked at each other for a few moments, then back at the sky. It held us fascinated. The meteors—evidently a portion of the great stream which had escaped the hydrogen shields—came scattering to right and left from that point on the horizon where Mars would rise. East and west, north and south, they spread; the sky was full of their brief shinings. It has been said by those who remember the great Leonid showers of 1866-7, that those displays were almost as nothing compared with the terribly grand vision of a hurricane of stars that blazed

through the heavens on that never-to-be-forgotten night of fate.

The number of the meteors was simply incalculable, and as their radiant point rose slowly to the horizon, the light of their intense incandescence grew hurtful to our weary eyes. Sheer exhaustion of the optic nerve drove us into the house, and the calm of an abnormal excitement bade us to the supper table. Then, after a short rest, back to the observatory. The meteor storm still swept in fiery violence through the silent sky.

The hours passed. Now voicing what scraps of forlorn hope we could find, and now relapsing into a stillness that seemed prophetic of the world as it would be in the lifeless days to come, we four sat in the observatory, waiting for a glimpse of Mars. Once or twice I went to the doorway and looked out across the quiet garden, thick and dense with the night shadows, illuminated only by the pulsing light of the meteor-riven heavens. The trees stood mysteriously grey and still, not a twig moved, nor a leaf upon the evergreens of the hedge. Away over the dim housetop, outlined as the horizon of the falling stars, the old Park Hill rose, a smudge of indistinguishable darkness, with one solitary house-light betokening the presence of humanity upon its desolate slope.

As I stood in the doorway the last time, thinking of time and space, and life and death and destiny, and love that is greater than all, yet ephemeral as those tiny bodies that were lighting the sky with their evanescent radiance—thoughts that one can *think*, but can neither write nor speak—Ethel



"I beheld a charred and blackened earth—a world in which there was no life—a world of darkness and utter desolation."

touched me on the arm. She then drew me within, closing the door softly after me.

"You will catch cold, Jack," she said. "And as the sky is clear of clouds, and the number of the meteors is diminishing, we shall soon have Mars in the field of the telescope."

I laughed, rather bitterly. With a grim sense of incongruous humour, I remarked that there had never been a finer chance of ignoring the laws of health, especially with regard to chills, as we should all, no doubt, be hot enough soon. Ethel put her hand over my mouth without answering, and I sat down. I shall never forget her calm courage in those nerve-straining hours.

Then Harrison slowly swung the tube round and adjusted the eyepiece according to calculation, and for a few minutes peered at the field of view. In silence his wife and then Ethel succeeded him at the instrument; in silence I, too, received upon my optic nerve those waves of ruddy light, which, having traversed forty-million miles of vibrant ether, told me Mars yet lived. Mars lived—the meteor stream was then too vast for even Martian intelligence to reduce to impotence. Mars lived—and therefore it and Earth, with the minor planets that yet remained to the relentless sun, must on the morrow die. Was this, then, the end of all—the Purpose of the Ages? . . . . . .

At that moment I heard, though faintly, the sound of feet on the road outside, then voices pitched in the key of despair, then a woman's choking sob. All suddenly the horror of it struck me as it had never done before. With a sharp cry I left the telescope and staggered to a chair, and out of the dim shadows under the galvanised dome my imagination fashioned a vision of the World's Death.

I saw the countless meteors still shooting, incandescent, through the air, and knew that when one fell to earth in dust ten billion billion more sped on towards the all-compelling, all-consuming, superheated sun. I saw fierce spots on his golden disc, and new red-flaming prominences around his rim, as though, insatiate, he reached out greedy arms towards the stricken planets. I saw his colour change to a fiercer red, and felt the scorching flood of his heat grow more and more intense, from tropical dawns to noons in which no men could live, save in dungeons and cellars and caves. I watched the temperate zone, fast followed by the tropic as that was pursued by the *burning zone*, recede to north and south, even to the shuddering Poles. I saw the Alpine hills grow moist, and the late snow run over and down them in warm, black torrents; saw the glaciers sweat and slip and slide, and, melting as they slid, descend with roar and ruin into flooded valleys. I saw grass go brown, and drop in dust where it did not burn. I saw the sea bubble and boil, and rise in clouds of scalding steam.

Finally, I beheld a charred and blackened earth—a world in which there was no life, neither of man nor beast, nor creeping nor flying thing, nor tree nor herb of any kind—a world of heat and darkness and utter desolation.

And then the vision passed; it could not have lasted many seconds. All was still and cold in the observatory. Ethel was looking at me, but not curiously. Harrison and his wife were looking at each other. Feeling that I must do something, that inaction would be dangerous, I once more put my eye to the telescope. I had not been watching Mars for twenty seconds when the ruddy planet melted away into the sky around him, showing again swiftly as a vast, expanding cloud of flame, shotted through and through with a myriad points of yet more vivid fire. A minute longer I remained at the tube, to make sure my eyes had not deceived me; then I told the others.

The cloud of consuming hydrogen lasted long enough for all of us to see it several times. After it faded, and whilst we three talked wildly and gladly, like doomed prisoners suddenly set free, Harrison's fingers were busy with the telegraph.

It was true, after all; quite true. Mars had died so that the earth *could* live. Those unknown intelligences who had warned us of the peril had made the last supreme sacrifice to avert the full fury of the great assault. It is a thought that even yet passes human comprehension, yet it is true—that a world has sacrificed itself for a world, a race of intelligent beings has blotted itself out of existence in order that another and less-intellectual race might live.

I need only add that the meteor display continued one night more and then ceased abruptly: that the approaching winter was very mild and the succeeding summer almost tropical: that the earth is now the largest planet of the Solar System; and that I married Ethel within the month.

THE WELL.

By W. W. JACOBS.

Author of "Many Cargoes," "The Skipper's Wooing," "Sea Urchins," &c., &c.

Illustrated by C. DUDLEY TENNANT.

I.

TWO men stood in the billiard-room of an old country house, talking. Play, which had been of a half-hearted nature, was over, and they sat at the open window, looking out over the park stretching away beneath them, conversing idly.

"Your time's nearly up, Jem," said one at length; "this time six weeks you'll be yawning out your honeymoon and cursing the man—woman, I mean—who invented them."

Jem Benson stretched his long limbs in the chair and grunted in dissent.

"I've never understood it," continued Wilfred Carr, yawning. "It's not in my line at all; I never had enough money for my own wants, let alone for two. Perhaps if I were as rich as you, or Crœsus, I might regard it differently."

There was just sufficient meaning in the latter part of the remark for his cousin to forbear replying to it. He continued to gaze out of the window and to smoke slowly.

"Not being as rich as Crœsus—or you," resumed Mr. Carr, regarding him from beneath lowered lids, "I paddle my own canoe down the stream of Time, and tying it to my friends' door-posts, go in to eat their dinners."

"Quite Venetian," said Jem Benson, still looking out of the window. "It's not a bad thing for you, Wilfred, that you have the door-posts and dinners—and friends."

Mr. Carr grunted in his turn. "Seriously though, Jem," he said slowly, "you're a lucky fellow, a very lucky fellow. If there is a better girl above ground than Olive I should like to see her."

"Yes," said the other quietly.

"She's such an exceptional girl," continued Carr, staring out of the window. "She's so good and gentle. She thinks you are a bundle of all the virtue ."

He laughed frankly and joyously, but the other man did not join him.

"Strong sense of right and wrong though," continued Carr, musingly. "Do you know, I believe that if she found out that you were not——"

"Not what?" demanded Benson, turning upon him fiercely. "Not what?"

"Everything that you are," returned his cousin, with a grin that belied his words. "I believe she'd drop you."

"Talk about something else," said Benson slowly; "your pleasantries are not always in the best taste."

Wilfred Carr rose, and taking a cue from the rack, bent over the board and practised one or two favourite shots. "The only other subject I can talk about just at present is my own financial affairs," he said slowly, as he walked round the table.

"Talk about something else," said Benson again, bluntly.

"And the two things are connected," said Carr, and dropping his cue, he half sat on the table and eyed his cousin.

There was a long silence. Benson pitched the end of his cigar out of the window, and leaning back, closed his eyes.

"Do you follow me?" said Carr at length.

Benson opened his eyes and nodded at the window. "Do you want to follow my cigar?" he demanded.

"I should prefer to depart by the usual way for your sake," returned the other, unabashed. "If I left by the window all sorts of questions would be asked, and you know what a talkative chap I am."

"So long as you don't talk about my affairs," returned the other, restraining himself by an obvious effort, "you can talk yourself hoarse."

"I'm in a mess," said Carr slowly, "a devil of a mess. If I don't raise fifteen

hundred pounds by this day fortnight, I may be getting my board and lodging free."

"Would that be any change?" questioned Benson.

"The quality would," retorted the other. "The address also would not be good. Seriously, Jem, will you let me have the fifteen hundred?"

"No," said the other simply.

Carr went white. "It's to save me from ruin," he said thickly.

"I've helped you till I'm tired," said Benson, turning and regarding him, "and it is all to no good. If you've got in a mess, get out of it. You should not be so fond of giving autographs away."



His cousin reached forward suddenly and pinned him down on the table.

"It's foolish, I admit," said Carr deliberately. "I won't do so any more. By the way, I've got some to sell. You needn't sneer. They're not my own."

"Whose are they?" enquired the other.

"Yours."

Benson got up from his chair and crossed over to him. "What is this?" he asked quietly. "Blackmail?"

"Call it what you like," said Carr. "I've got some letters for sale, price fifteen hundred pounds. And I know a man who wants to buy them at that price for the mere chance of getting Olive from you. I'll give you first offer."

"If you've got any letters bearing my signature, you will be good enough to give them to me," said Benson very slowly.

"They're mine," said Carr lightly; "given to me by the lady you wrote them to. I must say that they are not all in the best possible taste."

His cousin reached forward suddenly, and catching him by the collar of his coat pinned him down on the table.

"Give me those letters," he breathed, sticking his face close to his cousin's.

"They're not here," said Carr, struggling. "I'm not a fool. Let me go, or I'll raise the price."

The other man raised him from the table in his powerful hands, apparently with the intention of dashing his head against it. Then suddenly his hold relaxed as an astonished-looking maid-servant entered the room with letters. Carr sat up hastily.

"That's how it was done," said Benson, for the girl's benefit, as he took the letters.

"I don't wonder at the other man making him pay for it then," said Carr blandly.

"You will give me those letters?" said Benson suggestively, as the girl left the room.

"At the price I mentioned, yes," said Carr, "but so sure as I'm a living man, if you lay your clumsy hands on me again, I'll double it. Now, I'll leave you for a time while you think it over."

He took a cigar from the box and lighting it carefully quitted the room. His cousin waited until the door had closed behind him, and then turning to the window sat there in a fit of fury as silent as it was terrible.

The air was fresh and sweet from the park, heavy with the scent of new-mown grass. The fragrance of a cigar was now added to it, and glancing out he saw his cousin pacing slowly by. He rose and went to the door, and then, apparently altering his mind, returned to the window and watched the figure of his cousin as it moved slowly away into the moonlight. Then he rose again, and for a long time the room was empty.

* * * *

It was empty when Mrs. Benson came in some time later to say good-night to her son on her way to bed. She walked slowly round the table, and pausing at the window gazed from it in idle thought, until she saw the figure of her son advancing with rapid strides to the house. He looked up at the window.

"Good-night," said she.

"Good-night," said Benson, in a deep voice.

"Where is Wilfred?"

"Oh, he has gone," said Benson.

"Gone?"

"We had a few words; he was wanting money again, and I gave him a piece of my mind. I don't think we shall see him again."

"Poor Wilfred!" sighed Mrs. Benson. "He is always in trouble of some sort. I hope that you were not too hard upon him."

"No more than he deserved," said her son sternly. "Good-night."

II.

The well, which had long ago fallen into disuse, was almost hidden by the thick tangle of undergrowth which ran riot at that corner of the old park. It was partly covered by the shrunken half of a lid, above which a rusty windlass creaked in company with the music of the pines when the wind blew strongly. The full light of the sun never reached it, and the ground surrounding it was moist and green when other parts of the park were gaping with the heat.

Two people, walking slowly round the park in the fragrant stillness of a summer evening, strayed in the direction of the well.

"No use going through this wilderness, Olive," said Benson, pausing on the outskirts of the pines and eyeing with some disfavour the gloom beyond.

"Best part of the park," said the girl briskly; "you know it's my favourite spot."

"I know you're very fond of sitting on the coping," said the man slowly, "and I wish you wouldn't. One day you will lean back too far and fall in."

"And make the acquaintance of Truth," said Olive lightly. "Come along."

She ran from him and was lost in the shadow of the pines, the bracken crackling beneath her feet as she ran. Her companion followed slowly, and emerging from the gloom saw her poised daintily on the edge of the well with her feet hidden in the rank grass and nettles which surrounded it. She motioned her companion to take a seat by her side, and smiled softly as she felt a strong arm passed about her waist.

"I like this place," said she, breaking a long silence. "it is so dismal—so uncanny. Do you know I wouldn't dare to sit here alone, Jem. I should imagine that all sorts of dreadful things were hidden behind the bushes and trees, waiting to spring out on me. Ugh!"

"You'd better let me take you in," said her companion tenderly; "the well isn't always wholesome, especially in the hot weather. Let's make a move."

The girl gave an obstinate little shake, and settled herself more securely on her seat.

"Smoke your cigar in peace," she said quietly. "I am settled here for a quiet talk. Has anything been heard of Wilfred yet?"

"Nothing."

"Quite a dramatic disappearance, isn't it?" she continued. "Another scrape, I suppose, and another letter for you in the same old strain: 'Dear Jem, help me out.'"

Jem Benson blew a cloud of fragrant smoke into the air, and holding his cigar between his teeth, brushed away the ash from his coat sleeve.

"I wonder what he would have done without you," said the girl, pressing his arm affectionately. "Gone under long ago, I suppose. When we are married, Jem, I shall presume upon the relationship to lecture him. He is very wild, but he has his good points, poor fellow."

"I never saw them," said Benson, with startling bitterness. "God knows, I never saw them."

"He is nobody's enemy but his own," said the girl, startled by this outburst.

"You don't know much about him," said the other shortly. "He was not above blackmail; not above ruining the life of a friend to do himself a benefit. A loafer, a cur and a liar!"

The girl looked up at him soberly but timidly, and took his arm without a word, and they both sat silent while evening deepened into night and the beams of the moon, filtering through the branches, surrounded them with a silver network. Her head sank upon his shoulder, till suddenly, with a sharp cry, she sprang to her feet.

"What was that?" she cried breathlessly.

"What was what?" demanded Benson, springing up and clutching her fast by the arm.

She caught her breath and tried to laugh. "You're hurting me, Jem."

His hold relaxed.

"What is the matter?" he asked gently. "What was it startled you?"

"I was startled," she said, slowly putting her hands on his shoulder. "I suppose the words I used just now are ringing in my ears, but I fancied that somebody behind us whispered, 'Jem, help me out.'"



"Oh, my bracelet," she cried in distress, "my poor mother's bracelet. I dropped it down the well."

"Fancy," repeated Benson, and his voice shook; "but these fancies are not good for you. You—are frightened—at the dark and the gloom of these trees. Let me take you back to the house."

"No, I'm not frightened," said the girl, reseating herself. "I should never be really frightened of anything when you were with me, Jem. I'm surprised at myself for being so silly."

The man made no reply but stood, a strong, dark figure, a yard or two from the well, as though waiting for her to join him.

"Come and sit down, sir," cried Olive, patting the brickwork with her small white hand, "one would think that you did not like your company."

He obeyed slowly and took a seat by her side, drawing so hard at his cigar that the light of it shone upon his face at every breath. He passed his arm, firm and rigid

as steel, behind her, with his hand resting on the brickwork beyond.

"Are you warm enough?" he asked tenderly, as she made a little movement.

"Pretty fair," she shivered; "one oughtn't to be cold at this time of the year, but there's a cold damp air comes up from the well."

As she spoke a faint splash sounded from the depths below, and for the second time that evening she sprang from the well with a little cry of dismay.

"What is it now?" he asked in a fearful voice. He stood by her side and gazed at the well, as though half expecting to see the cause of her alarm emerge from it.

"Oh, my bracelet," she cried in distress, "my poor mother's bracelet. I dropped it down the well."

"Your bracelet!" repeated Benson dully. "Your bracelet? The diamond one?"

"The one that was my mother's," said Olive. "Oh, we can get it back, surely. We must have the water drained off."

"Your bracelet!" repeated Benson stupidly.

"Jem," said the girl in terrified tones, "dear Jem, what is the matter!"

For the man she loved was standing regarding her with horror. The moon which touched it was not responsible for all the whiteness of the distorted face, and she shrank back in fear to the edge of the well. He saw her fear, and by a mighty effort regained his composure and took her hand.

"Poor little girl," he murmured, "you frightened me. I was not looking when you cried, and I thought that you were slipping from my arms, down—down——"

His voice broke, and the girl, throwing herself into his arms, clung to him convulsively.

"There, there," said Benson fondly, "don't cry, don't cry."

"To-morrow," said Olive, half laughing, half crying, "we will all come round the well with hook and line and fish for it. It will be quite a new sport."

"No, we must try some other way," said Benson. "You shall have it back."

"How?" asked the girl.

"You shall see," said Benson. "To-morrow morning at latest you shall have it back Till then promise me that you will not mention your loss to anyone. Promise."

"I promise," said Olive wonderingly. "But why not?"

"It is of great value for one thing, and—but there—there are many reasons. For one thing, it is my duty to get it for you."

"Wouldn't you like to jump down for it?" she asked mischievously. "Listen."

She stooped for a stone and dropped it down.

"Fancy being where that is now," she said, peering into the blackness; "fancy going round and round like a mouse in a pail, clutching at the slimy sides, with the water filling your mouth, and looking up to the little patch of sky above."

"You had better come in," said Benson very quietly. "You are developing a taste for the morbid and horrible."

The girl turned, and taking his arm walked slowly in the direction of the house. Mrs. Benson, who was sitting in the porch, rose to receive them.

"You shouldn't have kept her out so long," she said chidingly; "where have you been?"

"Sitting on the well," said Olive, smiling, "discussing our future."

"I don't believe that place is healthy," said Mrs. Benson emphatically. "I really think it might be filled in, Jem."

"All right," said her son slowly. "Pity it wasn't filled in long ago."

He took the chair vacated by his mother as she entered the house with Olive, and with his hands hanging limply over the sides sat in deep thought. After a time he rose, and going upstairs to a room which was set apart for sporting requisites selected a sea fishing line and some hooks and stole softly downstairs again. He walked swiftly across the park in the direction of the well, turning before he entered the shadow of the trees to look back at the lighted windows of the house. Then, having arranged his line, he sat on the edge of the well and cautiously lowered it.

He sat with his lips compressed, occasionally looking about him in a startled fashion, as though he half expected to see something peering at him from the belt of trees. Time after time he lowered his line until at length in pulling it up he heard a little metallic tinkle against the side of the well.

He held his breath then, and forgetting his fears drew the line in inch by inch, so as not to lose its precious burden. His pulse beat rapidly, and his eyes were bright. As the line came slowly in he saw the catch hanging to the hook, and with a steady hand

drew the last few feet in. Then he saw that instead of the bracelet he had hooked a bunch of keys.

With a faint cry he shook them from the hook into the water below, and stood breathing heavily. Not a sound broke the stillness of the night. He walked up and down a bit and stretched his great muscles, then he came back to the well and resumed his task.

For an hour or more the line was lowered without result. In his eagerness he forgot his fears, and with eyes bent down the well fished slowly and carefully. Twice the hook became entangled in something, and was with difficulty released. It caught a third time, and all his efforts failed to free it. Then he dropped the line down the well, and with head bent walked towards the house.



A long pull and a strong pull, and the face of a dead man came peering over the edge. With a great cry George let go his hold of the rope and stepped back.

He went first to the stables at the rear, and then retiring to his room for some time paced restlessly up and down. Then without removing his clothes he flung himself upon the bed and fell into a troubled sleep.

III.

Long before anybody else was astir he arose and stole softly downstairs. The sunlight was stealing in at every crevice, and flashing in long streaks across the darkened rooms. The dining-room into which he looked struck chill and cheerless in the dark yellow light which came through the lowered blinds. He remembered that it had the same appearance when his father lay dead in the house; now, as then, everything seemed ghastly and unreal; the very chairs, standing as their occupants had left them the night before, seemed to be indulging in some dark communication of ideas.

Slowly and noiselessly he opened the hall door and passed into the fragrant air beyond. The sun was shining on the drenched grass and trees, and a slowly vanishing white mist rolled like smoke about the grounds. For a moment he stood, breathing deeply the sweet air of the morning, and then walked slowly in the direction of the stables.

The rusty creaking of a pump-handle and a spatter of water upon the red-tiled court-yard showed that somebody else was astir, and a few steps farther he beheld a brawny, sandy-haired man gasping wildly under severe self-infliction at the pump.

"Everything ready, George?" he asked quietly.

"Yes, sir," said the man, straightening up suddenly and touching his forehead. "Bob's just finishing the arrangements inside. It's a lovely morning for a dip. The water in that well must be just icy."

"Be as quick as you can," said Benson impatiently.

"Very good, sir," said George, burnishing his face harshly with a very small towel which had been hanging over the top of the pump. "Hurry up, Bob."

In answer to his summons, a man appeared at the door of the stable with a coil of stout rope over his arm and a large metal candlestick in his hand.

"Just to try the air, sir," said George, following his master's glance, "a well gets rather foul sometimes, but if a candle can live down it a man can."

His master nodded, and the man, hastily pulling up the neck of his shirt and thrusting his arms through his waistcoat, followed him as he led the way slowly to the well.

"Beg pardon, sir," said George, drawing up to his side, "but you are not looking over and above well this morning. If you'll let me go down I'd enjoy the bath."

"No, no," said Benson peremptorily.

"You ain't fit to go down, sir," persisted his follower. "I've never seen you look so before. Now, if——"

"Mind your business," said his master curtly.

George became silent, and the three walked with swinging strides through the long, wet grass to the well. Bob flung the rope on the ground, and at a sign from his master handed him the candlestick.

"Here's the line for it, sir," said Bob, fumbling in his pockets.

Benson took it from him and slowly tied it to the candlestick. Then he placed it on the edge of the well and, striking a match, lit the candle and began slowly to lower it.

"Hold hard, sir," said George quickly, laying his hand on his arm, "you must tilt it or the string'll burn through."

Even as he spoke the string parted and the candlestick fell into the water below.

Benson swore quietly.

"I'll soon get another," said George, starting up.

"Never mind, the well's all right," said Benson.

"It won't take a moment, sir," said the other, over his shoulder.

"Are you master here, or am I?" said Benson hoarsely.

George came back slowly, a glance at his master's face stopped the protest upon his tongue, and he stood by watching him sulkily as he sat on the well and removed his outer garments. Both men watched him curiously, as having completed his preparations he stood grim and silent with his hands by his side.

"I wish you'd let me go sir," said George, plucking up courage to address him. "You ain't fit to go, you've got a chill or something. I shouldn't wonder it's the typhoid. They've got it in the village bad."

For a moment Benson looked at him angrily, then his gaze softened. "Not this time, George," he said quietly. He took the looped end of the rope and placed it under his arms, and sitting down, threw one leg over the side of the well.

"How are you going about it, sir?" queried George, laying hold of the rope and signing to Bob to do the same.

"I'll call out when I reach the water," said Benson; "then pay out three yards more quickly so that I can get to the bottom."

"Very good, sir," answered both.

Their master threw the other leg over the coping and sat motionless. His back was turned towards the men as he sat with head bent, looking down the shaft. He sat for so long that George became uneasy.

"All right, sir?" he enquired.

"Yes," said Benson slowly. "If I tug at the rope, George, pull up at once. Lower away."

The rope passed steadily through their hands until a hollow cry from the darkness below and a faint splashing warned them

that he had reached the water. They gave him three yards more, and stood with relaxed grasp and strained ears, waiting.

"He's gone under," said Bob in a low voice.

The other nodded, and moistening his huge palms took a firmer grip of the rope.

Fully a minute passed, and the men began to exchange uneasy glances. Then a sudden tremendous jerk followed by a series of feebler ones nearly tore the rope from their grasp.

"Pull!" shouted George, placing one foot on the side and hauling desperately. "Pull! pull! He's stuck fast; he's not coming; P—U—LL!"

In response to their terrific exertions the rope came slowly in, inch by inch, until at length a violent splashing was heard, and at the same moment a scream of unutterable horror came echoing up the shaft.

"What a weight he is!" panted Bob. "He's stuck fast or something. Keep still, sir; for heaven's sake, keep still."

For the taut rope was being jerked violently by the struggles of the weight at the end of it. Both men with grunts and sighs hauled it in foot by foot.

"All right, sir," cried George cheerfully.

He had one foot against the well, and was pulling manfully; the burden was nearing the top. A long pull and a strong pull, and the face of a dead man with mud in the eyes and nostrils came peering over the edge. Behind it was the ghastly face of his master; but this he saw too late, for with a great cry George let go his hold of the rope and stepped back. The suddenness overthrew his assistant, and the rope tore through his hands. There was a frightful splash.

"You fool!" stammered Bob, and ran to the well helplessly.

"Run!" cried George. "Run for another line."

He bent over the coping and called eagerly dow" as his assistant sped back to the stables shouting wildly. His voice re-echoed down the shaft, but all else was silence.

